

# LESSONS OF LOVE

*Samuel Youd*





**MESSAGES OF LOVE** opens in Switzerland where two sisters, Katherine and Victoria, are on holiday with their father in the comfortable days before the First World War. Deeply fond of each other, they are even more deeply certain that their world of order, privilege and security is indestructible. Katherine and Victoria marry two very different Englishmen--the one brilliant, mercurial and ambitious; the other quiet, determined but lacking in self-confidence. Both men are engaged in the Lancashire cotton trade--not as partners, but as business competitors.

Samuel Youd's novel is the story of what happens when these people with their family affections for one another, their conflicting business interests, their sense of responsibility and their essential humanity, pass through the common tragedy of two wars into the uncertainties of the world today. Their children grow up in a new and disordered society, divorced from the ease and security of pre-war Europe, separated from their parents and from one another by new and bitter experiences.

**MESSAGES OF LOVE** is a novel of wide sweep and import, a moving social panorama welded together as surely as its diverse characters by ties of family affection.





# *Messages of Love*

SAMUEL YOUD



LONGMANS

*Ce désir grandit avec l'âge,  
La retour seul en peut guérir.  
Quand on est né sur ce rivage  
Sur ce rivage on veut mourir.*

EUGÈNE RAMBERT

ONE



THE TRAIN, which had left some passengers at Vevey, set down a considerably larger number at Montreux. The platform was crowded, with tourists and their servants, and porters both from the station and from the hotels. There was a gray sky and a cold wind—not a *bise*, because the *bise* did not touch this corner of the lake, but cold enough. The women drew their furs closely round them and twined their fingers together in the warm confines of their muffs. The men moved more briskly. After the warmth of the Wagons-Lits compartments, the January air stung the exposed skin.

Victoria Sickert and Katharine Burchall, who less than a year earlier had been the Misses Fanshawe, stood together and looked at a familiar scene. On this side of the station were the terminuses for the branch lines: the mountain railway up to Rochers de Naye and the link, recently electrified, between Montreux and the Bernese Oberland. There was a steam engine on the far cogwheel track, its tender, supported by the disproportionately large driving wheels, jutting awkwardly up in the air. Nearer, the three coaches of the M.O.B. train stood waiting but empty.

Victoria was the younger and physically the slighter of the sisters. She had blond hair, escaping in small curls from beneath her fur cap, and her cheeks, normally pale, were fanned by

the morning's chill to a delicate rose. Katharine, an inch or two taller and more imposing in figure, had dark hair, black except when some bright light struck the deep tint of chestnut from it, and her cheeks were a fuller crimson. One would have thought them separated by more than the eighteen months' difference in their ages. Katharine was a young matron, Victoria a girl who happened also to be a bride. Lionel Sickert, as he approached them, smiled as he saw her tapping her booted foot with impatience.

"We've found the baggage," he said. "John is seeing to it."

Like his wife, he was fair-skinned and fair-haired, but he was a tall man, a little over six feet, and, although thin, looked strong. He had a mustache, but the hair at the sides of his face was cut back to an unfashionably high level. His features were clean and sharp; one was conscious of taut flesh and the bone underlying it. In manner he was confident and easy, with the deliberation of someone who has mastered shyness.

"And Marie?" Victoria asked.

"She is checking them too. Or gossiping. The porter seems to be an old acquaintance of hers."

"Poor Marie," Victoria said. "She must have been lonely in England."

With a huff of steam, the train began to draw out of the station. The crowd was thinning, but it was still not possible to see far. From the ruck a porter emerged with a trolley loaded with their luggage, the maid trotting beside the porter and John Burchall a step or two behind them.

Katharine called to him, "John!"

He nodded and smiled. He was a stocky man, not much taller than his wife. In age he was three years junior to Lionel, and his manner lacked the other's assurance. He was completely clean-shaven, but heavy dark eyebrows, in particular, gave him a hairy look. His skin was very white and had a faintly oily gleam. He also had a nose larger than the average, and a heavy chin, beneath which flesh was already beginning to jowl. In their parts his features might seem Oriental, but that was not the over-all impression. They were set in the sober skeptical mold of the north-country Englishman, and it was the mold that counted. He had wary, watchful brown eyes.

"We've run into a bit of difficulty," he said. The hard flat edge of Lancashire was in his voice too. He jerked his head toward the empty coaches on the M.O.B. line. "The train's not running."

Lionel said, "Why not?"

"It's a bit vague. I gather the electric wires somewhere up the line were blown down last night, and they haven't got them fixed yet. The porter doesn't seem to know much about it."

"Wait here," Lionel said. "I'll go and find out."

He strode away toward the stationmaster's office.

Katharine said, "I hope we shan't be held up for long. This is a nuisance. The steam trains used not to break down like this."

"Perhaps we should have breakfasted on the train," Victoria said. She looked up at the sky. "There will be snow in the hills."

"I could take you to the buffet," John said.

Victoria shook her head. "We'll wait. He will be back soon. This place doesn't change much, does it?"

"Well," Katharine said, "it hasn't been long. Eight months."

People were crossing the tracks to the other platform. Victoria lifted her muff slightly in a pointing gesture.

"The Rigbys," she said. "I didn't know they were on the train. She's grown stouter, don't you think?"

"Perhaps so. Here's Lionel. What's the news?"

"They talk too fast," Lionel said.

"Shall I go?" Victoria asked.

"I don't think they know what's happening, anyway," Lionel put his hand on his wife's arm. "I have a better idea. We'll take a cab up to La Jatte."

John said, "We have tickets for the train."

Lionel shrugged. "I don't care for the notion of waiting around in Montreux while they repair the line. It could take hours—all day perhaps." He looked at the ladies. "And we can't telephone your father."

Katharine said, "But we could telephone the hotel, and they would send a boy up."

"We can be there by the time they do that."

"What about the luggage?" John asked.

"Marie can look after it." He nodded to the maid. "*Ça va, Marie? Tu restes ici avec le bagage?*"

She nodded. "Of course, monsieur."

"So that's all right." He took a gold ten-franc piece from his pocket and handed it to her. "Get yourself breakfast in the buffet, Marie. And keep yourself out of the cold."

They brought up the rear of the procession that moved across and down the steps to the front of the station. There was a single cab left on the rank. The coach was cracked in places and the horse, a chestnut, was past its prime, but Lionel handed the ladies in with satisfaction.

"La Jatte," he directed. "Hôtel Édouard."

The cab smelled of plush and wet paper. They sat close together: cold seemed concentrated in this small space. The driver offered a rug for the ladies, but Katharine declined it. She said in English, "I would rather be cold than cover myself with that."

Lionel said, "You will soon be warmer." He drew the windows as tight as possible. "We shall warm each other up as we go."

They went up over the level crossing and took the first of the steep hairpins on the road to La Jatte. The cab jolted and lurched on the loose stones; fortunately the surface was dry. The road flattened out somewhat as it followed the railway line toward Fontanivent, and on their left the town came into view, the long waters of the lake, and the mountains on the other side. Runnels of snow issued from the gray cloud which covered the peaks.

They did not get warmer; on the contrary, as the cab slowly traveled higher and the even colder air found its way through crevices and holes in the coachwork, their discomfort increased. At Fontanivent they could see the wooded crest of Cubly, powdered with snow, and snow covering the slopes down below Chamby.

Katharine said, "This is absurd, Lionel. We shall be quite frozen by the time we are there. We would have been better staying in the buffet."

"It's a hideous place," he told her. "Like a cave."

"Then we could have had breakfast at the Suisse."

"Travel hopefully," he said. "Think of the breakfast we shall have at the Édouard. Adversity should be used to encourage appetite."

Katharine said with exasperation, "You are careless of others. Particularly of Vicky."



"Vicky is not so fragile," Lionel said. "She's stronger than ever. Isn't that so?"

Victoria nodded. "But hungry," she said, "and cold."

Lionel unbuttoned his overcoat and, standing up awkwardly in the swaying cab, took it off. Despite his wife's protests he covered her knees with it.

"There. Is that better?"

"You should not. You will be too cold yourself."

"Not a bit."

Joan started to follow suit, but Katharine stopped him. "No. You must not. It's different for Vicky." She looked at Lionel. "I still think we should have stayed in Montreux."

"We'll soon be there."

"Soon! An hour almost."

"You can stop at Chamby," Lionel said, "if you wish. Breakfast at the hotel there, and take the train up when one comes."

"Perhaps we will do that. Vicky too. You can go on alone."

Victoria smiled. "That would be too hard, I think."

As it happened, none of them got out at Chamby; the question was not raised again. Snow was ruttled on the road and deep all round, thick on the roofs of the few small buildings and the vast hotel that stood above them. The gray lowering sky made the scene untempting and the railway track ran empty and desolate and snow-drifted through the trees. The cab rolled on silently apart from the cries of the driver, urging the horse when its hoofs slipped on patches of ice. Lionel looked at his wife with affection. He remembered what his father had said, seeing her for the first time: "An elegant woman. Pretty too, but elegance wears better. And a wife has to last you."

The road now wound along the side of the valley, the slanting fields snowy and then green below them, reaching down to the Chauderon gorge. Across the valley lay Glion and Caux, sprinkled still more thickly with chalets and hotels. There was plenty of activity in these parts; and on this side of the valley too, with Chamby, Les Avants, La Jatte itself. Buying land would probably be a good investment. But even if there had been the money to spare, Lionel thought, the idea would not have attracted him. Land speculation was a static thing, a matter of waiting for another man's enterprise to bear fruit. And there was not the

money to spare; all that he had and all he might borrow could be used more profitably, and to a better purpose.

They crossed the railway line again, and the way now ran straight to La Jatte, not much more than a kilometer away. The prospect of soon reaching their destination, of food and warmth, enlivened them all. Victoria and Katharine looked out with greater interest at the accustomed landmarks.

"That will be the Americans' chalet," Katharine said, "the people from Detroit. Remember, it was being built in the summer."

"They're a long way from the village," Victoria commented, "and they have no view of the lake. Look at the size of those ricks on the Pettit land. They must have got the third crop of hay in last year."

Rounding the final bend, they saw the village lying before them, behind it the concave sweep of hillside from which its name was most probably derived. When they had last seen it, the high angled meadows had been green, specked with the vivid colors of flowers. Now the sides and fronts of buildings showed dark against the prevailing white, and small black figures were outlined on the slopes. There was plenty of activity, despite the unpromising morning, on the ski and luge runs.

John said, "What was that?"

His head was lifted, listening for a noise; the second time they all heard it and recognized it at once. Katharine exclaimed in exasperation, Victoria giggled. John allowed himself a noncommittal smile.

Lionel said, grinning, "Well, we shall be there first, if not by much."

The road recrossed the line at the entrance to the village; their hotel, like the station, was only just beyond the crossing. The train whistled again behind them; as it did so the crossing bars came slowly down in front, and the driver clucked his horse to a halt.

Having sent word of their arrival up to the chalet, the couples took their time over breakfast and settling in at the hotel. They had taken a suite between them. The Sickerts had a private bathroom attached to their bedroom, and the sitting room was com-

mon. They were on the south side, on the second floor, and all the windows looked out over the Chauderon valley to the lake, two thousand feet below, and to the French Alps. Directly beneath their windows were the hotel grounds—the gardens blurred with snow and the tennis courts flooded and frozen to make a skating rink. As many as a dozen figures glided round this arena, scarves flying, voices trailing upward through the cold air.

They strolled up to Chalet Fanshawe for a late luncheon. Gilbert Fanshawe watched for them from the veranda. His daughters called up to him as they came into view on the road below, and he waved silently, smiling gravely. He was a small spare man with a pointed beard that showed no trace of gray, although he was now past fifty. He dressed with apparent carelessness but colorfully; today he was wearing a wine-colored doeskin jacket and a yellow bow tie.

The snow had been cleared from the steps that led to the chalet, but there was a mass of it in front of the door. He apologized for this as he greeted them.

"A fall from the roof," he said, "not more than ten minutes after the boy had finished sweeping it. I've sent word for him to come up again after school. Well, my darlings, how are you? You look well."

His daughters embraced him. Victoria said, "Is it little Pierre still?"

Gilbert stood aside to admit them. "No, not Pierre. He has left school now and gone to be a waiter or something in Montreux. The Breton boy, Jean."

Madame Duclos took their coats. Her husband operated the funicular railway between La Jatte and Champney, and they had the small house that was built over the station at the top. She had kept house for Gilbert since his daughters' marriage and departure for England, coming in early in the morning and staying, on most days, until eight in the evening, with a young girl from the village to help her. Katharine had been chiefly responsible for arranging this. She asked her in French, "Everything goes well, Jeanette?"

"Excellently, madame. Monsieur Fanshawe looks well, I think?"

"Yes. There's no doubt of that."

"You also, madame. And Madame Sickert. I think Madame Sickert looks better than she did. More robust."

Gilbert took them into the *salon*. He poured cognac and soda for the two men and himself.

Victoria said, "I will have some sherry wine, Papa."

He looked at her with mild surprise. "Will you, Vicky? And Kitty too?"

Katharine said, "No. None for me."

"Well," he said, "you are both married." His look returned, reflectively, to his younger daughter. "Married, and drinking sherry."

"Not only that," Victoria said. She smiled. "We have other news I did not write in a letter. I thought it could wait until we came here."

Katharine said, "The room seems strange. Something is missing. Your easel, Papa."

"You forget that I have an empty house now. I have made myself a studio in Vicky's old bedroom." He reached down, with agility, and replaced a log that had fallen out of the fire. Straightening up again, he said, "Well, the other news? I will brace myself for it. It's not the end of life to become a grandfather."

Shocked, Victoria said, "You knew?" She glanced at her sister. "Not from Kitty?" Her look went swiftly to the mirror on the wall. "Surely . . ."

"I'm very pleased," Gilbert said. He smiled at her. "No, maternity doesn't show itself in you yet. It was only a guess, though a reasonable one. Married, and drinking sherry—it's not too difficult to anticipate an equally obvious change." He turned to Katharine. "And you, Kitty? No news at all?"

She smiled, with something of disapproval. "Nothing like that, Papa."

"Well," he said, "there is time enough."

"How are things here?" Katharine asked him. "Jeanette is looking after you properly?"

"Yes, indeed. She is a surprisingly good cook, as you will see shortly. I lead a quiet life, an unsocial one. It suits me, perhaps too well." He smiled. "A quiet hearth for a cold heart."

Victoria said, "If you've been sticking in the mud, we can't look to you for a summary of the gossip since we left."

"I'm afraid not. You will doubtless find others who will supply the deficiency, though. But I think your wedding was the occasion of the year. From the few encounters I have had, I gather it is still talked of."

"And now," Victoria said with satisfaction, "they can have something else to talk of."

Watching the expression on his elder daughter's face, Gilbert said, "So she still lacks decorum, Kitty? No change there, at any rate."

Katharine shook her head. "No change," she agreed.

Victoria ran her hands lightly over her waist. She was wearing a black velvet sheath gown over a braided silk vest and a chemisette of tucked muslin. The fairness of her skin and hair was set off by the black, enhanced by the white.

"Decorum!" she echoed, smiling. "Papa, who else is here that we know?"

Gilbert opened his hands to her. "I've told you. I see scarcely a soul these days."

"The Tulenkovs, surely?"

He nodded. "They came yesterday, but I haven't seen any of them yet. I saw the carriage draw up, and Jeanette had told me they were expected. There have been fires lit the past week."

"Think of it," Victoria said. She took her sister's hands and danced a step or two around her. "We will be at the Tulenkov ball this year as married women! Could anything be pleasanter?"

"If they have only just come," Katharine said, "they will scarcely be having the ball before John and Lionel go back."

Victoria laughed. "As grass widows, then! Isn't that even more splendid?"

Lionel said dryly, "We need not worry about leaving the women to pine for us, John."

Victoria left Katharine and went to her husband.

"Then stay and guard us," she said. "A week is a ridiculously short time to stay—hardly worth the coming out."

Lionel shook his head. "We shall have to trust you. Better to leave you on your own than a mill. Especially at the moment."

She laughed again. "Me, at the moment—or the mill? Both are changing."

"Change is something I trust," Lionel said. "But some kinds need more attention than others."

"Wives need attention. Do you trust me, changing or not?"

"I do."

She reached up to kiss him. Gilbert watched them with open amusement, John with a humor better concealed, Katharine apparently with none. A bell rang, and Gilbert gestured toward the dining room.

"The same cowbell," Katharine said. "So Jeanette rings it still!"

"Nothing has changed here," Gilbert said, "except by your going."

With the arrival of the main winter snow, the road between La Jatte and the heights of Champney was closed to ordinary traffic and, in fact, the bobsled run followed it down to a point just above the village. Fifty yards or so above the Chalet Russe it swerved away from the road in a last long curve through the meadows, to finish almost directly in front of the Hôtel Édouard VII. It was a slow run set against those at some of the more famous resorts, but fast enough for visitors to La Jatte. The Sickerts and the Burchalls swept down on the morning after their arrival, John steering and Lionel at the brake. They came to a halt on the banked-up snow and uncurled themselves from their seats, laughing, the ladies brushing snow from the hems of their skirts.

"Pretty good," Lionel said, "but I thought you were going to have us over the top on that sharp bend, John."

"It was you," Katharine said. "You let us travel into it too fast. You should have braked earlier."

"Division of control," Lionel said. He waved his hand. "The fault is in the sport."

"It requires co-operation," Katharine said, "if that's a fault."

Victoria shook her head, and her hair fell loose under her ermine toque.

"Cold," she said, "but lovely."

There was a keen breeze blowing down from the northeast, and

a good deal of fast-traveling cloud in the sky. But the sky between was a deep clear blue and the clouds golden-edged with sunlight. Now they stood in the sun's brilliance, and could watch the clouds' shadows coursing across the slopes above them. There were plenty of others about; cries, laughter bobbed like corks on the buoyant air. They heard the dull groan of straining metal as the funicular was set in motion and the heavily loaded coach, pulling a truck laden with skis and luges, began to rise to meet its fellow crawling down from Champney.

Lionel pointed. "We've missed the train. Do we tail up?"

Katharine said, "I think I've had enough for this morning. And Vicky must not overdo things."

"Nonsense," Victoria said. "What harm can there be in bobbing?"

John put a hand on his wife's elbow and another on Victoria's. He said, "A hot chocolate first, eh, and then we can think about it?"

The only street in La Jatte traversed it in the shape of an elongated S, the center of the S being the broad thoroughfare leading up from the station buildings to the Hôtel de Naye. The Hôtel Edouard, with its grounds and outbuildings, took up a large part of the right-hand side; on the left a row of linked chalets made up the chief part of the village's shopping center. Above them the Café Corjon stood apart, fronted by a terrace that was set out with tables. It faced south, and the high roofs of the Hôtel Edouard just failed to capture its sun.

Screens had been set up at the far end of the terrace to protect the tables from the breeze blowing down from the Col de Jaman, and half a dozen people were already sitting there. One of them rose from his seat as the English party came up the steps to the terrace. He was a man about forty-five, heavily built, spade-bearded, with an expression of sly geniality that would have suited a hotelier. He was wearing a suit of dark-gray Scotch tweed with brown boots and gaiters. His hands rested on a silver-topped walking stick and he carried a monocle attached to a thin gold chain. His masculinity was distinctive.

He greeted Victoria and Katharine warmly, bowing to them

before putting his hand out to take theirs. Katharine made the introductions for the men.

"This is General Tulenkov," she explained.

"Your husbands," Tulenkov said. He looked at the men, smiling. "We should have liked to come to the wedding, but our arrangements were already made for the Crimea. You gave us small warning."

"Is everyone here?" Victoria asked.

"Everyone. The children are out skiing somewhere. I am surprised you have not seen them. Minna is resting this morning. And I, as you see, am drinking tea. Will you permit me to get you some refreshment?"

"Thank you, General," Katharine said.

"General? Does marriage put such a barrier between us?"

She smiled. "We will have chocolate, Peppi."

"Better," he said. Please be seated, gentlemen. Will you have chocolate also, or something else?"

"Chocolate, I think," Lionel said, "at this time of the day. Thank you, sir."

"So you have married these two beautiful young ladies," Tulenkov said, resuming his own seat, "and taken them from the shores of sparkling Léman to the dark Lancashire wastes. Love is more powerful than one commonly thinks. I would give almost everything for the chance of living the year round here at La Jatte, and they toss it away without a single thought or regret. You are in cotton?"

Lionel nodded. "Yes."

"I have a small interest in that line, too, in Russia. We are very backward, of course, when compared with Lancashire; but we improve. Perhaps I shall be able to pick your brains."

Victoria said, "You're joking, Peppi. How can you find the time for cotton, with all your parades and maneuvers?"

"One must think of the future. Mine is a dying profession. It will last my time, but my son will need to look elsewhere."

Lionel said, "Do you believe that, sir?"

"Yes, I do."

"There is still a lot of sword-rattling going on."

Tulenkov smiled. "In the English press, at any rate. Your



journalists are the most bloodthirsty in Europe, I fancy. But they count for nothing. Events make their own destiny. And honor belongs to the landlord and the sword, not to the mill-owner and the machine-gun. It cannot be entered in the books."

John said: "But do you regret that, General? I think you do."

"Regret and realism," Tulenkov said, "are both important factors in the Russian character. That is well known. But I think we must abandon this subject as unsuited to the morning and the place." He smiled at the ladies. "Tell me, will your new husbands spare you to dance with an old man at the ball this year?"

"They will not be here," Victoria said. "They can only remain a week. Kitty and I are staying on afterward with Papa."

"A week? I think we must do more than merely improve. But if that is so, we must have the ball earlier. On Thursday, perhaps? You are not leaving before then?"

Victoria said, "Oh, no, Peppi! You mustn't. There won't be time."

"You will see that we Russians can work quickly, too. We will telephone the printer this morning and have the cards up here by the evening. You will have your invitations tomorrow."

He spoke with mock grandiloquence, his eyes showing his amusement.

Victoria said, "Peppi darling, you mustn't promise without Minna. It isn't fair."

Tulenkov laughed. "Who has ever known Minna to object to a ball taking place sooner than she expected?"

The billiard room at the Hôtel Edouard was reached by way of the smoking room, a double door of oak, paneled with green baize, prevented the click of ivory from disturbing those who preferred the less active recreation. There were three full-size tables and a half table, but now, close on noon, only Lionel and Gilbert were playing there.

Billiards was one of the passions of Gilbert's life: mild, like all his passions, but insatiable. His acquired skill compensated for the fact that Lionel had a better eye and a surer hand. Running out with a break of fifteen, he said, "Another game, Lionel? Or have you had enough for one morning?"

Lionel, who was wearing a watch on his wrist, glanced at it. "Why not? We have time enough."

Gilbert reached across the table to set up the balls. He said, "What did you say John was doing?"

"Getting in some ski practice."

Gilbert said, "He enjoys learning things. In business, too, I should think."

"Yes. Are you giving me anything, sir?"

"No, I don't think so. I was a little lucky last time. They think highly of him in Sickert's?"

"No doubt of that. He's a first-class man."

"And the firm itself," Gilbert observed, "is a first-class firm."

"It hardly needs saying. But I can say it now without embarrassment."

Lionel stepped back, smiling, from the table and adjusted the score pegs on the wall. Gilbert chalked his cue with care. The lights above the table flickered momentarily to dimness and brightened again.

"Yes, exactly," Gilbert said. "It has worried me a little that you should have left the firm so soon after your marriage."

"I think you could say that marriage provided the final push. I examined things more closely. I realized that my prospects for the future were not what I could have wished."

"But it's your family firm."

"I'm not on the main stem, you know."

"These things count, though."

"To a degree. In this case, not enough."

"And John?"

"It's different for John."

Gilbert nodded. "I see that."

"It's not just a matter of money. John has more patience than I have, and you need patience in an organization like Sickert's. They don't change very fast. They don't need to."

"And that," said Gilbert, "didn't suit you either."

"It's a matter of temperament. The choice was between remaining in a permanently subordinate position in a big, safe, slow-moving company, or moving to a smaller pond where one might strike a few ripples."

"So you bought into—what is it again? Laverton's?"

"Leverton's. There was what my mother left me, and I sold my Sickert shares."

Gilbert smiled. "I was thinking of buying some."

"I shouldn't. They're conservative on dividends too. A four per cent yield and not much prospect of improvement. Nor of deterioration, of course. A very safe stock to hold."

"Should I buy Leverton's? I haven't a lot to spare, and I want security and income."

"It's still a private company. For the present. I'll tell you when you can buy."

"You sound confident, Lionel."

"It's a good firm. Special lines. The Manchester and Liverpool thinks so too. We've had no trouble over credit."

There was a pause while Gilbert made two easy cannons and narrowly failed in a difficult attempt to go in off the red. He straightened up with a sigh.

"You're spending a lot, then?"

"Spending," Lionel said, "expanding, modernizing. Chiefly modernizing. A firm as big as Sickert's can afford to take things easy, but a small business can't. We're going over to electric power, for one thing."

The table lights flickered again, dimming nearly to extinction before resuming their brightness. Lionel sliced his shot.

"I don't trust electricity," Gilbert said. "But I'm probably wrong about that."

"Our supply is provided by the Manchester Corporation," Lionel said. He went to the board and marked up the penalty. "To distrust electricity is to distrust the future."

"I suppose it is. And that would be silly, wouldn't it? But as you know, I live in a backwater."

"A rapidly developing one."

"Yes. I've thought occasionally of leaving the place. I could get a good price for the chalet, enough to permit me to build in a quieter spot—Blonay perhaps."

Lionel nodded. "A nice little village. But I prefer La Jatte."

"So do I," Gilbert agreed. "So do the tourists. I hear there are two millionaires staying at the hotel at this moment."

Lionel grinned. "I think I've seen one of them! I'm sure I've seen his wife."

"I've never thought money important," Gilbert said. "So many people who have it seem not to know how to live."

"I suppose if you have a great deal of money it becomes important. If you haven't enough it does, too."

Gilbert said, "But you're not in that position."

"Not in either position. That makes it easier to know how to live, as you put it."

"Indifference to money derives from character, not the other way round."

"No. I can't agree, sir."

Gilbert smiled. "Are you a socialist, then?"

"Not exactly. But something like socialism has to come, I think."

"Part of the future," Gilbert said. "Like electricity."

"Yes."

"You may well be right. Not in my time. Perhaps not in yours. It's your children they will strip."

"If they do strip him," Lionel said, "I think my son should be able to stand up naked. If you abandon privilege, there's more chance for merit."

"And if he doesn't have merit?"

"He will have. But if he doesn't, I don't think having things easy will help."

"One must have a lot of self-confidence to say that," Gilbert said. "I've always had things easy. I'm glad I have. I would wish the same for my grandson; but you may be right."

"You need not worry about him," Lionel said.

The slopes above Champney were better for skiing. They were more free of cloud, which sometimes settled at the level of La Jatte, and they had a longer, gentler decline toward Sonloup and the valley of the Pleiades. There were level stretches where skijoring was practiced; General Tulenkov's son and daughter were there, following the horses with superb ease. They were both tall and dark and physically handsome, but their handsomeness was of different kinds. The boy, Alex, who was seventeen, had a

long pale face, capable of looking angelic when animated, but sullen in repose. Trina, a year younger, was sturdier; she had thick, coarse curly hair and two brown moles, one below the left eye and another farther down on her cheek.

Katharine and John remained on the nursery slope just behind the funicular station and the hotel. Katharine was a skilled performer, rather more so than Victoria, but John was finding difficulties; he had not skied before this visit. Victoria took Lionel farther up, along the cart track, now marked only by an occasional hump in the snow and by the traces of other skiers, which wound around toward the Col de Jaman. He was a pupil, too, but a more apt and less dutiful one. It had been here, two winters before, that he had met the Fanshawe sisters while winter-sporting. The following summer he had come back, on a walking tour, and brought John Burchall with him. And within a year of that there had been the double wedding at La Jatte.

"Better now," Victoria said critically, "but you must keep your knees together. And lean a little more."

"I'm getting the hang. How about trying down this slope now?"

"Too steep."

"I can only fall."

"Down this way is better."

"Too easy," Lionel said.

"Well, try it."

He eased himself forward off the sticks and skied down, without difficulty if without grace. Victoria followed him, telemarking to his side at the bottom.

"If you practice this a few times," she said, "you'll have it."

They began the climb back. Lionel in front and Victoria side-stepping in his traces. Near the top he slipped and she put her arms up to support him. He recovered himself before the support was necessary.

"Going down's all right," he said, "but getting back's a sweat." He reached the top and stretched a hand down to her. "The slope's too short to make it worth one's while."

He stretched his arms, sticks dangling from their thongs, and drew in breath. Exhaling, he breathed a cloud into the air.

Victoria said, "I can't ski as I want to, either, remember."

Lionel grinned at her. "For quite a different reason."

"Kitty was scolding me again this morning—she says I shouldn't come out on the slopes at all. No exercise more violent than a gentle walk from the hotel to the chalet."

"Kitty belongs to the old generation, you to the new."

"Do you think so?" She dropped on one knee to retie a lace. Looking up, she said, "I think it's more likely just carelessness. I can never visualize new things happening. Not even the baby. That's probably why I don't worry either."

"There's no need to worry, as long as you take reasonable care. Nothing more is necessary."

She said, with some indignation, "You don't fuss over me at all, do you?"

"Why should I? A healthy, happy, pregnant woman—I can think of no one who needs it less. Well, the long slope now?"

Without waiting for an answer, he spurred away in a direction at right angles to the slope from which they had just ascended. Here the fall of land was steeper and the run considerably longer. It led, about a quarter of a mile away, to the lower road where the skijorers were active. It was not difficult for someone with any skill, but presented hazards, particularly in two or three steeper drops on the way, to the novice.

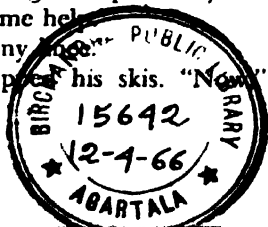
Victoria followed her husband down. He managed the first half quite well, but then she saw that he was going faster than he could control. She called to him, "Lye! If you can't stop, fall sideways."

He paid no attention, but careered grimly on. After some wavering he seemed to regain balance, but his speed was increasing all the time. He reached a dip followed by a small rise and another deeper hollow. His right ski left the ground and then dug into the snow. He crashed in a confusion of limbs and skis, and Victoria came to an easy halt beside him.

She reached down to help him up. "I told you." She saw his face was twisting with pain. "Lye darling, have you hurt yourself? Lie still. Let me help."

"It's only my knee."

She unstrapped his skis. "Now," she said, "let me lift you."



Rs-11.16

Put your weight on the other leg. That's it. Now try a little weight on this one."

He grimaced. "It's no good."

His weight fell on her again and she eased him down onto the snow. They were not more than fifty yards from the lower road. Alex Tulenkov was racing along behind the horse in the direction of Champney. Victoria waved to him and shouted, and he lifted a hand from the whiffle bar to wave back.

"I'll get a stretcher!" he called.

Victoria settled beside Lionel. "Any better now?" she asked.

"On the contrary, it's beginning to hurt."

She nodded. "That puts an end to your skiing for this winter. You should have stopped when I told you."

"I couldn't."

"You could by falling."

"I didn't think that was the right thing to do."

"You fell in the end, anyway, and more heavily."

"I might not have done." He propped himself in a more comfortable position and pulled Victoria toward him. "I suppose the only thing to do is wait."

"Yes."

There was some cloud in the valley beneath them and more hiding the lake, which would otherwise have been visible below Sonloup. It gleamed white and had a solid fleecy look; by comparison the snow all round them was sparkingly insubstantial. Across the valley, the dark smudge of a train wound its way up through the snowy contours of the Pleiades, but between the two heights, through breaks in the cloud, they could see a different world: of browns and greens, as though already touched with spring.

Victoria said, after a silence, "Kitty will have something to say."

Lionel shifted position. "Then I shall have something to say to Kitty."

"No, you mustn't."

"Why not? Aren't I allowed to defend myself?"

"Not against Kitty."

"She's your elder sister," he said, "and John's wife. Sister-in-law is a different relationship altogether—a lot more distant."

"You have to make allowances."

He looked astonished. "For what?" He moved again and this time groaned with pain. "Curse it."

"Up there," Victoria said, "I was saying how I could never visualize new things happening. I find it hard to see them even when they have happened. People change. The things around them change, and they change too. I suppose they can't help it."

"That would probably be very true," Lionel said, "if I could understand it."

"Be reasonable," Victoria said. She looked at him with heavy patience. "It's obvious when you look at it. They could not afford to bring a maid, so she has to share Marie. You're paying more for the suite and we have the bathroom adjoining our bedroom. Her dress allowance is not much more than half mine."

"She resents it?"

"Well, of course she does."

Victoria removed her toque. He put his hands to her hair, holding curls up in the sunlight, weighing it as though it were a precious metal.

"Are you telling me," he said, "that if the circumstances had been reversed—if it had been Kitty's maid and Kitty with the bigger allowance—you would have sniped at her and John the way she's sniped at us?" Victoria was silent. He wound a coil of hair around under her chin. "If you are, I don't believe it. I don't believe it."

"It might depend."

"On what?"

"On whether she had you as well."

"What does that mean?"

"We used to be very close—we're so nearly the same age and, as you know, Mama died when Kitty was only five. I remember the way we talked about you when we first met you, the way girls talk about young men."

"What way is that?"

She smiled. "It doesn't matter. When you started to pay more attention, naturally we wondered which of us it was. I didn't think it could be me. I don't think Kitty did at first, either. Perhaps she still had hopes in the summer. I think now she did, but



already we weren't confiding in each other as much as we had done."

"Anyway, I brought John with me. They made a match of it soon enough."

"Yes. As soon as it was obvious it was me you wanted."

"Are you saying she took John because she couldn't get me?"

Victoria sighed. "You put too hard an edge on things."

"I'm only putting into words what you're hinting."

"Well, sometimes things which are true enough as hints are less true when you make statements of them."

He moved, and made another exclamation of pain. "I think I must have torn a muscle." He looked at her. "How is it you haven't said anything about this before?"

"No reason why I should."

"But you've chattered enough, and about Kitty."

She was silent for a moment. "It's something I've only just realized."

He settled her weight more firmly against him. "And what was the cause of your just realizing?"

"Little things. You know."

"I know when you're deceiving me."

She blushed. "It was after she had been telling me I ought not to go skiing. She said it might be dangerous for the baby. I told her you thought that was old-fashioned, that a woman only need take reasonable care and she could do whatever she liked. So then she asked me if . . . I still let you make love to me."

Lionel grinned. "Did she?"

"From the way she said it, I realized that really she was jealous. And when I looked at it like that, I could understand other things too."

"If it is true," Lionel said, "it's a bit unfair on John."

"Unfair?"

"Don't you think so?"

She said scornfully, "John got what he wanted."

"And what was that?"

"To copy you, of course, as he always does. You found a wife in Switzerland, and it turned out there was a sister for him. It couldn't have been better."

"Now you're being unfair to him. He's a good chap."

She smiled. "Well, of course."

"In himself, I mean."

Victoria looked closely at her husband. "I wouldn't have married him. I think it's poor Kitty."

"At any rate, we're the fortunate ones. Shall we settle for that?"

"Yes, I think so."

He put his hand against her stomach. "Very fortunate."

"Dearest, dearest."

She released herself from him and lay back against the snow, resting her head on the bright cushion of her hair. Lying as she was he could see the flaws in her features: the slightly thin nose, the too pronounced angle of jaw, the faint grooves that would turn into wrinkles. Even now she was not beautiful, and, as age tightened and dried out the flesh, to others she might come to seem an ugly woman. But him, he knew, she would always fascinate, mind and body alike, as long as he lived. He reached down and kissed her, ignoring the pain in his knee.

General Tulenkov said, "Are you comfortable? We can arrange to have an easy chair brought up."

"No, thank you. This is fine."

"*Hors de combat*," the General said, "and watching the ladies in their finery. I recall it as one of the most agreeable experiences of my life. Do you find it so?"

"It's not unpleasant."

"Surely, something more than that. I was younger than you at the time—not much more than twenty. And even if not precisely wounded in the military sense, I was a military casualty—a gun carriage rolled back on me during maneuvers and broke my arm. I went to the royal ball at St. Petersburg with my arm fastened in a scarlet sash. And I have never known women look lovelier than on that night, when I could neither dance with them nor embrace them. They flirted with me, and swept away to dance in the arms of unimpeded men, and came back to flirt again. It sets a woman at her highest pitch to know she can flirt with impunity, and for me—well, there was all the pleasure of desire with neither the urgency nor the prospect of satiation that commonly

go with it. The air was soft and bright and full of promises. What promises they were! Some I succeeded in redeeming when my arm had knit again, but many of them could only live on impossibility. Afterward they shriveled and died, as both sides had known they would; and they were the best, of course."

Lionel said, "It's pleasant to sit and watch sometimes. But there's no military glory about twisting a knee learning to ski. One feels a fool."

"Not so complete a fool, I assure you, as an artillery officer who has been run over by one of his own guns! But it is the setting that counts: the music, the lights, the ladies in their softness and their splendor, oneself nobly incapacitated. And young. The incapacitation of age is a vastly different thing. You will discover that. Still, it is a pity about your accident, since it prevents your skiing when the weather and the snow are both so good."

"Do you ski yourself, sir?"

Tulenkov shook his head. "After forty, a man is a fool to attempt to learn new sports. And although I enjoy our season here—from my own point of view, not merely because of the children—it always seems strange to me that snow should be associated with the pleasures of young men and women. In Russia, snow is a more serious business, our daily lives are conditioned by it."

"But you have sports in the winter, surely?"

"Not such as this." He laughed. "Shall I tell you one of our favorites? It requires a pig."

"A pig?"

"A small one. We take him out with us, on the sleighs, and then someone holds him up by his hind legs. He squeals—and the squeal even of a little pig carries a long way over the snow. And we sit waiting."

"For what?"

"For our friends who have heard the squeals and who come hurrying over the snow, spilling froth from their jaws. The wolves. And instead of pig they find bullets, and the little pig goes home to squeal another day."

"Yes," Lionel said, "a more active sport than skiing."

"You must remember, concerning Russia, that it is a country of snow and wolves, a vast and hard land. When I am there and

*I think of the Western cities, of London and Paris, it is with incredulity. Even in Moscow or St. Petersburg the idea of the West seems unreal to me. And in the country, of course, the unreality is so much more marked. That is reality, one feels, the steppe and the forests, the burnt summer and the frozen winter."*

"And when you are here, does Russia seem as unreal?"

Tulenkov laughed. "No, never! But I can believe in this reality also, a reality that marches beside the other but never touches it. Ah, Minna beckons me. Are you sure you are quite comfortable? There is nothing I can have sent to you? A cushion?"

"No, thank you," Lionel said. "I'm quite all right."

Now that he was alone, Lionel's eyes looked for Victoria among the waltzing couples. He saw her as the music ended. She smiled over her fan at her partner, a bony awkward-looking man whom Lionel did not know, and then, dismissing him, came to her husband.

The gown she was wearing had no train; it was of white chiffon, cut short to clear the floor. It was trimmed with rosebuds and pearl beads and had a lace tucker. On her breast she carried a black velvet butterfly, the wings edged with fine wire set with silver paillettes. She was slightly flushed, exhilarated. She put her hands down to his.

"You look lonely," she said, "poor old thing"

He shook his head. "Enjoying yourself?"

"Tremendously. Can you hobble as far as the veranda?"

He smiled. "I think so."

"I'll get my wrap."

He had been sitting near the French windows; he got to his feet, with Victoria making a show of helping him, and they went outside. The night air was cool after the warmth of the room, but the chill was tempered by small braziers set out at intervals. There was no wind. Candle lanterns, hung from the wooden roof, sent their small flames straight up and burned with a steady light.

Lionel leaned against the wooden balustrade and Victoria stood beside him. Beneath them were the lights of the village, dwarfed by the irregularly patterned block of luminous squares which was the windows of the Hôtel Édouard. To the right of the hotel a faint glow came from the skating rink, itself hidden from view.

The night was all lights, each cluster or pinpoint making the invisible world wider, more far-reaching. The lights of Caux, of Glion, across the lake the lights of Bouveret and St. Gingolph. And out in the distance, nestling like stars against the dark clouds of the Alps, the lights of a small French mountain village. Round and about there was the faint shimmer that snow gives on a shrouded moonless night.

Victoria said, "It's dull for you, being crippled like this."

"No. I've been listening to the General."

"Peppi? What's he been telling you?"

"About the way they spend their time in Russia in the winter. Hunting wolves over the frozen plains."

She laughed. "How boring!"

"Not a bit. Very exciting, I should think. And we were discussing the advantages of attending a ball with a broken arm or a twisted knee."

She turned to him, smiling. "What advantages?"

"That the ladies look lovelier and flirt more willingly when you're not in a position to do much about it."

"Do they?"

"So he assures me. I think he may be right."

"Do I? Do I?"

"Which?"

She leaned forward and twisted her head round to look up into his face.

"Flirt?"

"You can't flirt with your husband."

"Then do I look lovelier?"

He looked at her carefully. "Yes, I think you do."

"That's not enough. You must be wilder, more violent—passionate."

He took her hand, smiling, and kissed it.

"You're wild enough for us both."

"Then I will be." She reached on tiptoe and kissed him. "I love you," she said, "wildly, passionately, and you're quite right. I could never flirt with you again. I don't want to. This is the best."

"Not quite. The best is yet to be."

She shook her head swiftly. "No."

"We shall see. Perhaps you'll be surprised."

With some scorn, she said, "I know what you're talking about. Being surrounded by wealth and children."

"Have you anything against that?"

"No. I shall enjoy it all tremendously. But this is the best, all the same—the absolute incomparable best."

"You're wrong. It's only the beginning."

"You don't know. You just don't know."

"The music's started. Help me back in there and I'll sit and watch you. It's too cold for you to stay out here, anyway."

She kissed him again, her arms tight about his neck.

"Remember this," she said.

## 2

THE MILL lay at the Manchester end of Ligham: once past it, the road ran through stone-walled fields, here and there broken by clumps of trees. The land here, as Lionel explained, belonged to the Stanleys. They owned almost the whole of the stretch between Ligham and Manchester.

"They could have got a good price for it," John said, "for housing."

"I fancy they thought they could get more," Lionel said, "and held out too long. The town went the other way. And the last twenty-five years the mill has been going downhill. They used to have six hundred hands, but they were down to four hundred and fifty when I took over."

"So they'll have another chance to sell, when you start expanding."

"I want to buy while things are still quiet. I've got an offer in now for a couple of hundred acres. I think they'll accept."

"You won't use all that for factory building."

"Perhaps not. We can build houses on what we don't need. I would buy more if it wasn't stretching things too far."

John said, "I didn't know you were interested in house property as well."

"Have you seen the houses they live in now? They're nearly as

bad as the Manchester slums. I'd like to do something better than that for them."

"There was more money backing Bournville than you are likely to have for a year or two."

"Yes. But the world won't come to an end in a year or two."

"No, I suppose not."

"Come on in," Lionel said, "and I'll show you round. You may get a few good ideas to take back to Sickert's."

John followed him in through the gateway set in the high stone wall and across the yard to the main building.

"They don't think they need any ideas," he said. "Not from me, anyway, and certainly not anything I might have picked up from you."

"They still don't love me, then?"

"They're waiting for you to make a mess of things. They love you that much."

Lionel laughed. "Maybe I will. I would rather do that than have stayed with them much longer. I think they know it, too. A family business is bad enough at the best of times, but a damn' sight worse if you're one of the family."

The offices had been newly painted in a soft bright orange and there were two girls sitting at desks, each with an Underwood typewriter in front of her. In the whole of Sickert's there was only one such machine: an old side-hoop Oliver which Lionel himself had managed to procure, along with a girl to operate it. It was in the lumber now, and the girl penned her letters like the others. The senior partners preferred this.

Lionel pointed to the windows; they were wide and looked new.

"We had to put new frames in," he said. "You could scarcely see in here without the lights on. My office is along the passage, but I'll take you in here. I want you to meet Wilf Maine."

"Your works manager?"

"Yes." He knocked on a door and opened it. Putting his head in, he asked, "Can you spare a few minutes, Will?"

This room also was clean and airy and newly painted; the bottom six feet of the walls were yellow boards and the rest light



blue. The desk was neat and almost empty. A table in a corner, although still neat, carried a large number of mechanical models and devices. On the floor beside it a piece of oilcloth was draped over what appeared, from its shape, to be another and larger model.

The man who got up from behind the desk as they entered the room was young and looked younger. He was a little below medium height, thin in build and face, with prominent cheekbones and a long rake of jaw. He had deep-set gray eyes and marked hollows in the temples. The only sign of animation in his features was provided by a curled mustache.

Lionel introduced them. Wilf said, "Glad to know you, Mr. Burchall."

"Can you come round with us?" Lionel asked. "You know a good deal more about it than I do." He nodded to John. "Wilf designed the whole layout."

Speaking stiffly, Wilf said, "I can manage it if you want me to, Mr. Sickert." He spoke the broad Lancashire of a workingman. "I'm not pressed right now."

As they went out into the yard again, Lionel said, "We've got both mule and ring spindles—equivalent to around a hundred thousand mules. They used to drive from two steam engines, a double-crank beam and a single-crank horizontal engine. Then you had the problem of getting the power from the engines down to where it was needed; they used spur gears, upright shafts and beveled gears from the big engine and had a rope drive with beveled gears from the small one. With the electrical drive we've got rid of the whole of the gears and the upright shafts."

"How did you manage to work during the change-over?" John asked.

Lionel pointed to two newly constructed towers rising one at each end of the mill.

"We built those motor towers. Steel structure with a glazed casing—not a brick in them. There are ten motors in each tower. We got them fixed in and then ran them onto the line shafts with flexible couplings. We got it all switched over in a weekend. At least, Wilf did. I didn't know much about what was going on."

Lionel led the other two over the various parts of the mill; he

did not call on Wilf for much by way of exposition, and when he did the explanations were given briefly, almost unwillingly. They were in the power room when one of the men came to summon Wilf with news of a breakdown in the carding room, and he excused himself with what seemed to be relief.

"Thirty-seven motors altogether fed from here," Lionel said, "generating not much under seventeen hundred horsepower. It comes in at sixty-five hundred volts and we transform it to four hundred for the motors and two hundred and twenty for lighting."

"It's a lot of power," John said. He gestured toward the closing door. "He's a bit on the surly side, isn't he?"

"Wilf? Just the reverse. He's a very volatile lad—quite a talker generally. He's shy, though, especially with people out of his class."

"Can you depend on him?"

"I wouldn't like to have tackled things without him. I brought him over from the Wenscott mill, you know."

"No, I didn't know. That's something else they will have against you."

"Well, no. I didn't persuade him to leave Sickert's. As a matter of fact he was sacked. He came to see me about it, and it was just the right time. I'd already been up here to look things over."

"Sacked? For what?"

"It was supposed to be for exceeding his authority—he put a couple of men on modifying one of the mule frames without reporting it. But the real trouble was politics. He's a thoroughgoing socialist. They reckoned he might set a bad example to the men."

"And don't you?"

"I'm not worried about it. We pay as good wages as any mill in the country—a good deal better than most, and that includes Sickert's. If we do as well as I hope, we can go on paying them, and if we don't it won't be the wages bill that breaks us."

"And anyway," John said, "you agree with him."

"Not entirely. But enough to sympathize. When the day of revolution dawns they may keep me on as an office boy. That's more than you've got to look forward to."

"I'm not sure. You're the capitalist, Lye. I don't own anything,

not even the house we live in. I reckon they'll be easier on me than on you."

They walked up the stairs into the yard. Closing the heavy metal door with its large danger sign, Lionel said, "If things ever get so bad that it comes to that, I don't think it will make much difference."

John took his watch out and consulted it. "I'd better be getting along if I'm to catch my train. There isn't another before six."

"If you wanted to stay, I could take you back in the motor."

"Thanks, but I need to get back to the office before they close. Do you use the motor every day to get to and from the mill?"

"It's quicker than the train and a lot more convenient. When are we going to see you two at Stenbridge again? Vicky was only saying the other day that it's a long time since we saw you. Only once since we were at La Jatte."

John looked uncomfortable. "Kitty handles that side of things. I'll jog her memory. How is Vicky? Keeping well?"

"Pretty good. But she's talking of going out to Switzerland for the confinement. She doesn't know many people here. My folks live in the south, of course, and we don't see too much of the Manchester Sickerts since I left."

John said earnestly, "That's got nothing to do with our not getting over, you know."

"No, I didn't think it did."

"It's—well, Kitty's very fond of Vicky, you know that, but she's not at her best right now. She's found it a bit hard to adjust to life over here as well."

"It's not too easy."

The absurdity of the situation, Lionel thought, was almost too marked to avoid comment, since surely they would adjust to difficulties more easily together than, as they were, separated by not more than ten miles of urban Lancashire. He did not comment, but was aware of the constraint imposed by their mutual ignoring of the issue.

Walking to the gate, John said: "Things will sort themselves out. I suppose one needs to be patient."

"Yes." Lionel felt a warmer rush of affection for John than he could recall having experienced before in the four or five years of

their friendship. "Things do sort themselves out. Sometimes you find yourself tied, but it doesn't mean you have to stay tied forever."

John looked at him, probing the significance of what had just been said. With surprise, Lionel realized that he might have taken the reference to a tie as meaning marriage. As they reached the gate, he put his hand on John's shoulder.

"If things go as they should," he said, "I may raid Sickert's for a good man in earnest. You know how things are, John. I wouldn't want to ask you till I was sure how it was going to turn out."

John asked, "Are you offering me a job after the work's done?"

Lionel grinned. "The work will only be beginning. And it's not exactly offering a job. I'll want you to come in with me properly."

"I won't have anything to bring."

"You'll have what I want."

"I've got that now, haven't I? You didn't ask me to come in from the beginning."

"You know why. Risking your own neck isn't the same as risking someone else's."

They stood under the arch of the gateway. After touching his cap to them, the gateman had retreated into his box. Barefoot children played in the road outside, stretching their limbs in the March sunshine. Across the street the houses began, starting with the Mill Arms.

John said, "If you want me, I'll resign from Sickert's tomorrow. I don't mind taking the chance."

Lionel stared at him. "I'll tell me," he said, "when I first told you of what I was going to do you were shocked, weren't you?"

"Yes. I was."

"You thought I ought to have staved where I was well off."

"I don't think so now. I think you did the right thing."

"Do you know how much I owe the bank?" Lionel smiled.

"Well, never mind that."

"I think I have a fair idea. That doesn't make any difference. I'll come in if you'll have me."

"No. Not yet. Stick it out with Sickert's for a few years and things will be different."

"Right. But the offer still holds."

"I'm grateful for it."

With some embarrassment, John said, "For what? You don't need me. I'm the one who's grateful. You know how far I'm likely to get in Sickert's."

"Yes. Maybe you'd better not mention being up here today."

John's heavy face broke slowly into a smile. "Don't worry. They know all about it. I was instructed—very obliquely, you know—to look things over and report back on what was happening."

"Were you?" Lionel laughed. "Well, you can tell them." He thought about this, and laughed again. "I'm rather pleased about that. I didn't know they were still so interested in what I was up to."

"They're interested." John put his hand out. "I must go now. Give our love to Vicky."

Lionel nodded. "And ours to Kitty."

He stood for a moment watching John walking away along the narrow pavement that ran beside the street. John leaned forward a little as he walked and moved faster than one would have thought. No, Lionel reflected, there were no regrets for leaving Sickert's. Turning away, walking through the gateway beneath the sign that said "Leverton's Mill," he felt a small thrill of exultation.

The baby was expected toward the end of July, and at the beginning of that month Victoria went out to La Jatte. Lionel followed a fortnight later. Between Lausanne and Montreux he stood in the corridor of the Wagons Lits carriage and looked at the lake, a delicate unwrinkled blue, backed by the mountains which rose from one haze into another.

Victoria met him off the train at the village station. Her pregnancy, to which he had grown accustomed over the months, now, after the two weeks of separation, had an impact; he felt a little in awe of her and hesitated before kissing her.

She said, "Are you ashamed of me?"

"Not a bit. How are you?"

"Expectant. But the nearer it gets the less sure I am of what I expect."

He left the luggage to be sent up later, and they walked slowly up through the village along the road that led to the outlying chalets and eventually to Champney. The morning was already hot but, at this height, not oppressively so, and from time to time they could feel a breeze that came down from the Verreaux. The hay meadows were thick and high with the year's second crop, less flowery now than in the abundance of spring but still colorful and perhaps even more richly scented. From somewhere behind them there came a thin intermittent tinkling.

"Cowbells?" Lionel suggested.

"No, sheep. The cows go up to the higher fields for the summer, to the parts that can't be cut for hay."

"A far cry from Manchester."

"Yes."

"But we couldn't stay here forever."

She shook her head. They walked in silence for a time. Then she said, "Madame Kathou at the *laiterie* loses her husband along with the cows. He goes up with them at the end of May and doesn't bring them down until October. The milk comes down by the train and they send messages to each other with the guard. Verbal messages. She can read and write, but he can't."

"Well," he said, "would you like that? You going up into the Alps at the beginning of the summer, leaving me in Manchester? We would do better than the Kathous. We can both read and write."

She looked at him, smiling, and put her hand in his. "What sort of messages?"

"Messages of love, from a distance."

Her small hand tightened on his fingers. "Darling," she said, "it's been two long weeks. I thought you were never coming."

"I came as soon as I could."

"And you will stay—until it's over?"

They came to the place where the railway crossed the road again. The track came out of a tunnel and there was a stretch of stone wall with bright-red flowers growing out of glossy green leaves here and there; the plants were rooted in cracks in the stone. Bees drowsed round the flowers, setting the air on edge with their humming. In the distance he heard the whistle of the

train he had just left, preparing to enter the longer tunnel which would take it through to the valley of the Hongrin.

"Listen," he said, "this year I should not have taken any time off at all. Wilf isn't."

"You're not Wilf."

"We'll be closed for Wakes Week, but he's staying at Ligham. There will be plenty for me to do too. Sweetheart, I wouldn't have been able to come out here at all if Wilf hadn't been as good as he is. I can't stay more than a week."

Victoria nodded. "I should have stayed in England. It's my fault, I know. Shall I go back with you? Would you like that?"

He said judiciously, "I think you'd better stay here now."

"So as not to run the risk of his being born on a cross-Channel steamer?" She laughed. "You're right. But as soon as the doctor lets me I'll come back—we both will."

He looked sideways at her gravid profile. "It's true, I can't wait. But if I have to go back I shall come out again as soon as there's news."

"Will you?" She sighed. "Isn't this all silly? The rest of our children I'll have sensibly in Manchester—I promise. I do stupid things, but I have sense enough generally not to do them twice."

"Not stupid, impulsive."

"It amounts to the same thing."

"No, it doesn't. I'm in love with you for the impulsive things you do. Kitty would never do anything impulsive."

"Poor Kitty. Did you hear from her before you left?"

"Not a word. Has she written to you?"

"I had a letter yesterday. Full of advice and cold comfort. She and John had been to dinner with the Percy Sickerts—it sounded as though they had patronized her fairly heavily."

"Poor Kitty," he said again.

"What about poor Vicky? The Percy Sickerts don't even ask me to dinner."

"That's because they don't like your husband. You've lived abroad all your lives, haven't you?"

"There were occasional visits to England, but they were very much visits. Otherwise, it was mainly Florence until Daddy de-

cided he was tired of the tourists and we came to live here. Darling, you know all this."

"I was trying again to see Manchester through your eyes. A very different kind of place. Different people, too."

"Yes."

"Like the Tulenkovs."

She said, "Lyc, I understand. I thought you did, too."

"Well," he said, "it's difficult for you and for them."

"More difficult for them. It would have been different if Kitty and I had been Tulenkovs or Italian countesses or something. That would have been enough to make up for our coming from abroad. But they know we're not foreign nobility and not rich—just expatriates. That's what makes it difficult. Don't worry. I'll be patient. Having a baby will make quite a difference. I shall soon be indistinguishable from the other Mancunian matrons."

He said with feeling, "I'd rather send you up to the higher pastures for half the year."

"From their point of view, anyway. I don't think I want to be natural with the world at large. It's for you that I let my hair down."

"It just seems odd," he said, "that you and Kitty should both be feeling—well, out of things, and yet . . ."

"I've done what I could."

"I know that. I wondered if there wasn't something else we could have done."

"Nothing but leave it. Perhaps becoming an aunt will soften her."

"Do you think it will?"

"No. Perhaps the reverse. But one must leave life to provide its own surprises."

They walked for a time in a comfortable silence. He said at last, "I love being the one you let down your hair for."

She gave him a quick glance, part mischievous, part wistful. "I wouldn't care to do it for anyone else."

They passed beneath the wall that sealed off the garden of the Chalet Russe. Looking up the drive, they could see the house standing among fir trees, backed by the wood of conifers that climbed the steep hillside toward Orgevaux. There were flowers



and fruit bushes in the garden. They had been well kept; even now a gardener was scything a sloping lawn.

"Do they ever come in the summer?" Lionel asked. "Or any time but for that month in the winter?"

"Six weeks," Victoria said. "Two months if the snow is very good. They came one summer—it will be four years ago. And once Peppi came by himself in the autumn for the hunting, but the hunting isn't very good here now. Too many tourists."

"And they grow fruit which they never eat," Lionel said, "and flowers which they never see."

"The housekeeper bottles a lot of the fruit. And she makes a wonderful concoction of layers of fruit and sugar covered with rum in a big earthenware jar. We were allowed a small saucerful."

"Very charming, but it's still waste."

"You have to be wasteful when you're rich. We shall be when we're rich."

He squeezed her hand. "I won't allow it."

He opened the small wooden gate and helped her up the steps to the Chalet Fenshawe. There was grass on either side of the path which needed cutting, and in among the springing green there was the rich red of Alpine strawberries. Victoria, agile despite her bulk, knelt down and picked a couple. She took one berry herself and put the other in her husband's mouth.

"I haven't asked," Lionel said, "how your father's coping with the prospects of having a birth in the house."

She smiled. "He's taking it very well, everything considered."

His father-in-law was coping. Lionel discovered, mainly by spending most of his time away from the house; he took his sketch pad out in the mornings and stayed out all day, getting a midday meal at one of the inns up in the hills. When he returned in the evening it was in a spirit of anxious inquiry, which changed to a complacent relief on finding that there was still no change to report. He appeared to have the impression that, in his daughter's case at any rate, the process of giving birth was bound to be a diurnal activity.

He was abetted by the weather, which remained halcyon, stirred only by enough breeze to moderate the summer's heat.

The sun rose over the brown ridges of Rochers de Naye, traveled across a changeless blue and couched at night behind the tree-bearded hill of Cubly. Victoria and Lionel had the small chalet to themselves, apart from the unobtrusive visits of Madame Duclos. Sometimes they walked down to the village, but for the greater part they sat in the garden, in the shade of the trees. They contrived to turn their minds from the uncertainties of their situation to its certainty: their isolation in the richly breathing summer, the unhurried fruiting of love.

Victoria's labor began on the fourth day of Lionel's stay, less than half an hour after Gilbert had set off up the road toward Champney. Madame Duclos had already arrived, and Lionel surrendered his wife into her hands while he went down to the village to telephone for the Montreux doctor. He felt calm and was surprised when, after he had telephoned from the *épicerie*, he felt something wet drop on his hand and, raising it to his face, discovered his forehead was dripping with sweat. He walked back up the hill to the chalet. A German family, starting the day's ramble, were a few yards in front of him: a man of about forty in shorts and brightly colored stockings, a thin soft-voiced wife, three boys in *Lederhosen*. It was a reassuring sight, a reminder that from the point of crisis life must flow on, or flow back, into its accustomed channels. They went on past the chalet and he stood for a second or two by the gate, watching them.

The doctor came up by motor from Montreux; he had a new Daimler with solid rubber tires and wheels in which hub and rim were connected by a series of heavy springs. He was French, tall and elegant, wearing thin gold spectacles, proud, it was apparent, of his motorcar and his fluent command of English. He took off a gray silk glove and offered Lionel a well-manicured hand.

"How do you do, Mr. Sickert?" he said. "Twenty-one minutes from the station at Montreux. That is not bad, is it? Normally I improve my times only on urgent cases. Yes, I know my way in this chalet."

He came down again a quarter of an hour later. He had taken off his jacket and now was unrolling his sleeves.

He said, "The ordeal will not be a very long one, Mr. Sickert."

"Thank God for that," Lionel said.

"Yes. At the same time, I think you should know that it will not be easy. The child lies a little awkwardly, and your wife is not pre-eminently suited for childbearing. We must thank God, Mr. Sickert, for small and large pelvises alike, but as a humble practitioner of the medical art I am inclined to congratulate Him more heartily on the latter."

"Is there any danger?"

"In the simplest and easiest delivery I can recall making, the unfortunate woman was dead three days later, dying, without a second's preparation, as she put her child to the breast. A blood clot had traveled to the heart, you see. Your wife is a healthy young woman, and I am a man of no inconsiderable skill at this work. Barring the completely unforeseen accident, which could take your life as easily as hers, I have no fears for your wife."

Lionel said awkwardly, "It is she that matters to me."

"Yes."

"Is there anything I can do?"

"Be confident. Knowledge and confidence together provide an answer to a very great number of the ills of this world in which we live. Excuse me. I require to get my instruments from the motor."

Lionel followed him outside. "Can I go up to her?"

"Yes. But I shall ask that you leave again soon. Five minutes, no more. Afterward it might be better for you to walk out in the air."

"I would like to stay as close as possible."

"It would be a mistake, that." The doctor put a hand on Lionel's arm. "I shall know what I am doing, and your wife will know what must be done. But for you the pain will have no meaning except torture. Walk up there on the hillside, warm your soul in the sunshine. I will come for you when it is time."

When Lionel went up to her, Victoria was lying gasping in an interval from pain, her face white and flat, her eyes exhausted and brimming with tears. He bent down and kissed her.

In a small sharp voice, she said, "Darling, I love you." Her face tightened and tears spilled onto her cheeks. "But go away," she said, "please, go away!"

There was a bench by the side of the road, provided for the

convenience of those who preferred walking up to Champney to taking the funicular. From it he could look down to the cluster of chalets perched on the side of the hill above the village. Chalet Fanshawe at present was the highest of these, though the ground above it was being cleared for further building—reputedly on the instructions of a French banker who was planning to have a house there. It looked small beside the neighboring Chalet Russe, and as empty, as deserted.

He had walked up from the house slowly, his limbs responding reluctantly as though in the partial grip of some paralysis. When he sat down on the bench it was with a physical relief, but almost at once the relief was swallowed up in tension. A growing ache in his jaw made him conscious that his teeth were clamped together; he made the deliberate act of relaxation, but a few moments later realized that they were fixed again. The ache seemed to spread up to his temples. Then he nourished the pain, as though by doing so he could subtract so much from what was taking place down the hill.

When he became aware of this, he was annoyed by his irrationality. There were points where communication failed, however much one loved, and the truth was that he could not help her now—could do nothing but wait. The helplessness he felt at this instant was different in kind from any he could remember ever feeling in his life before. For a moment it was so great as to induce despair: if this place and time existed, even though one did not encounter it more than once or twice in a lifetime, it touched the whole fabric with futility. To build anything worth while, the foundations must be solid. It was not enough to hope that somehow things would last out one's own time.

This mood passed too. Despair was as irrational, after all, as the illusion of sharing another's pain. And down there, under the quiet red-tiled roof, there was affirmation as well as agony—the beginning of new life, all the promise of the future. That was what a man could build on, a tie to the strangeness and surprise that lay ahead. With a shock of pleasure, he thought, If he lives to be a very old man, he may see in the twenty-first century; at any rate, his son will—my grandson.

He saw a figure emerge from the front door of the chalet and

got to his feet immediately. The doctor scanned the hillside, caught sight of him and waved. The gesture, casual, almost boyish, told him that it was over, and that all was well.

They met at the place where three apple trees stood together by the side of the road; two of them were barren, but in the third fruit hung from the branches, brighter green than the leaves surrounding them.

The doctor said, "You have a son, Mr. Sickert."

"How is she?"

"Well."

They walked down the road together. The silence between them was not a natural one; there was constraint, the awareness of something undisclosed.

Lionel said, "You are quite sure she is all right? There are no complications?"

"Your wife is weak, as is to be expected. But her constitution is good. You may be reassured about her health." The doctor was silent for a moment or two. "The little one will need watching. He has had a hard journey here, and he is not so strong. But the *femme sage* is a woman of competence. For the time being she will remain here with you." He looked around at the sunlit slopes of La Jatte. "A hard journey, but coming into a bright country.

*"Quand on est né sur ce rivage  
sur ce rivage on veut mourir.*

We must hope he will take joy in it and grow strong."

Something remained to be said. As they reached the gate of the chalet, Lionel said, "My wife . . ."

"She is well, I tell you. You will see in a moment that she is well." Lionel opened the gate and stood aside. While his hand rested on the sun-warmed wood, the doctor put his own hand over it and looked down from the step, light flashing against his spectacles. "But no more babies. You have your son, and that must be enough. The risk would be too great."

In the next two days, while Victoria steadily recovered strength, the child as steadily weakened. At first he cried a good deal, thin wails of unappeasable misery. During the night, while Victoria

lay in a drugged sleep, Lionel got up and went to the room where Madame Gessenay, the *femme sage*, was tending to him. This was Gilbert's bedroom; after offering due congratulations he had retired for the time being to the Hôtel Édouard.

"*Comment ça va?*" he asked awkwardly. "*Un peu mal?*"

"*Pas très bien.*"

They looked down together at the small white face in the frilled, blue-ribboned cot. He had always associated the thought of babies crying with an image of small faces flushed with their exertions; the paleness was strange and frightening. He put his hand down to the child, feeling for warmth and the pulse of life.

The midwife said to him, gently but with no hesitation, "*Allez dormir, monsieur. Je le garde.*"

The next day the child cried less, and that night he slept with no apparent disturbance. But this was not a sign of improvement; rather, it was as though the effort of complaint had become too great. The doctor on his visit stared at the baby for some time but did not attempt any closer examination.

Lionel said, "Is there anything we can do?"

"No." The doctor closed his bag with a snap. "Mrs. Sickert is much stronger. That is important."

"And the boy?"

"I do not think he likes this world enough. I am sorry, Mr. Sickert."

"Can we take him down to the hospital in Montreux?"

"There is nothing they can do, either. And you burden him with a long journey and a seven-hundred-meter change of altitude. It is best to leave him. Madame Gessenay has her instructions, and she will carry them out with all care. For your part, you could pray, perhaps."

Lionel said bitterly, "Medically speaking, do you advise that?"

"From the point of view of the recovery of a patient, no. But it is sometimes of help to the relatives."

That night, looking at the still white face before he retired for the night, Lionel thought that the small flicker of animation there was in it would be extinguished before the morning. But in the morning the child still lived, and later, when Victoria put him to her breast, he sucked—feebly and not for long, but he took

nourishment. During that day he grew no worse. The following morning Lionel heard his cries again and took heart from them. He thought he detected an angrier, more defiant note than before—the cry of rage prefiguring joy.

He said to the doctor, "He has more strength than you thought."

"Yes. But he needs it still."

"I'm beginning to have hopes again," Lionel said.

"I advise against that. No, not professionally. It is just that I do not think the pleasures of hope weigh much against the chance of hope destroyed. It is better to wait. Be sober but be prepared to smile."

"I prefer to hope."

The doctor shrugged. "We do as our temperaments require us. Perhaps yours is the happier one."

In the afternoon, leaving Victoria to rest, Lionel went to his room and took out the various papers he had brought with him and which he had meant to study when time offered. This was the first opportunity. There was a report on the Japanese cotton trade, a study of new developments in working-class housing, the patent specification for a new design of carding machinery and a number of miscellaneous reports and technical journals. He read them through slowly, making notes in the margins where appropriate. He sat by the window, and he looked out from time to time. There were some clouds in the sky, but they were high and white and floating far apart from one another. From the fields the electric crackle of grasshoppers was a carpet to all the other sounds—children singing somewhere, a man shouting orders at intervals, rhythmically, perhaps to a beast, the distant creak of the funicular, voices passing on the road.

He turned to a "Report on the Properties of Sunray Cloth." It was typewritten, but in bleary purple ink that ran at the edges of letters.

. . . the application of science to the cotton industry as to other industries. An example of this may be seen in relation to the distressingly high incidence of what is popularly called "sun-stroke" in tropic and even subtropic areas. This malady, which is so frequently fatal in its effect, spares none: the strong man is as prone to it as the delicate female or infant. He that one

moment laughed in the pride of his manhood in the next instant is stretched prone, pallid and bedewed with moisture, beyond help of medical care. Research, however, has shown that it is not the heat but the light rays that exercise the severest effect on the human physique; and these deadly actinic rays may be neutralized by passage through a scarlet substance, in a manner akin to that in which red light protects the sensitive photographic plate. Sunray sunproof cloth has the necessary actinic qualities to intercept or counteract the sun's rays. The outer surface of Sunray can be of various shades. The underside is red yarn, and in this lies protection. The manifest benefits . . .

His concentration was snapped by the sound of Madame Gessenay's tread on the landing. She was a big woman and moved heavily, and usually slowly. She was hurrying now. He looked up and saw her standing in the doorway.

"*Monsieur . . .*" she said.

"What is it?" He stood up. The report fell to the floor with a soft shiver of paper. "What has happened?"

Her heavy face was not much changed; only the brow was more deeply wrinkled.

"*Ton fils, monsieur.*" she said. "*Il est mort.*"

Katharine arrived in the morning without advance warning. Lionel was sitting by Victoria's bed when the door opened and she came in. For a moment Lionel thought it would be necessary to tell her of the child's death here, in front of Victoria, and wondered desperately how he could do it, but it was apparent almost at once that she had learned the news in the village. She went over to the other side of the bed and, saying nothing at first, took Victoria's head and pressed it against her breast. Victoria was weeping again, and Katharine wept with her. Their two heads bent together, drawn close by grief.

Katharine said, "Oh, my poor Vicky, my poor darling Vicky! I should have been here with you."

"There was nothing you could have done," Victoria said.

"I should have been here," Katharine repeated. "Oh, you poor love."

"I'm glad you've come. Kitty, I've missed you so much."



"I've missed you, too." Katharine looked over Victoria's head at Lionel, a wild sad expression in her face. He had not thought her capable of showing such an emotion. "Oh, my darling, my darling!"

"Can you stay a little?"

"As long as you like. As long as you want me to stay."

Victoria's face was drawn again into the tight lines of wretchedness. She said, "We have no room here—until the funeral."

"I can go to a hotel. When . . . ?"

"Tomorrow."

They drew together again, sobbing, and Lionel, after a moment, quietly left the room. He walked downstairs and out of the darkened house into the brightness and vigor of the day. Already the grasshoppers were in full song. He saw his father-in-law by the gate and went down the steps to meet him.

"Kitty's here," he said.

"They told me," Gilbert said. "Arrivals are always known in the village. I am glad she came."

"Are you going up to to see her?"

"That can wait. It's Vicky that needs her."

"Or to see Vicky."

Gilbert was silent for a time. "I am a coward," he said. "When you saw me, I had just decided to turn away again. But it is not only cowardice. I feel myself an intruder."

"Why should you feel that?"

Gilbert touched his beard, as though for reassurance. He was wearing black linen trousers and a dark-green silk shirt with a handkerchief in the breast pocket.

"Perhaps I should have remarried," he said. "I thought that not doing so would bring me closer to my daughters, but of course I was wrong. Another woman might have been a bridge between me and them. As it is, they turned to each other as soon as they began to be aware of womanhood. When they were little we were very close, but the closeness that existed then set us further apart later."

"Why should it?"

"I don't know. But I remember when my wife died—they were only four and five—my old nanny came out of retirement to help me look after them. It did not work. I had grown so far away

from the past, and from her, that the only way she could have approached would have been through the usual thicket of formalities, and even if she could have negotiated them, poor old thing, all the recognitions and resemblances would have debarred her. I made some excuse and sent her back to her cottage in Lincolnshire."

Lionel said, "Did you know Vicky and Kitty had been estranged from each other?"

Gilbert nodded. "I noticed it during the winter. And it was obvious when Vicky came out here by herself to have the baby." He turned his rather small gray eyes up toward the chalet. "Estrangement is something one must expect in life; death, separation, discrepancies of character or circumstance—its agents surround one. It is not so bad for those who have some armor, like Vicky."

"Vicky!"

"Yes. Kitty is more vulnerable."

"It hasn't been Vicky's fault. I can assure you of that."

"Ah, we are not talking about faults and blame. Have you not observed, Lye, that the sinned against may easily suffer less than the sinning?"

"I would not have thought Kitty the more sensitive either."

"No, I suppose you would not."

Lionel, in his turn, looked up toward the house. "At any rate, it seems as though the estrangement is at an end. I imagine it could only have been a temporary one, there is too much to bring them together against the little that might hold them apart."

Gilbert smiled at his son-in-law. "You see design in the world, Lye—purpose, laws of cause and effect, the meshing of gears as events roll forward to their destination."

"Do I?"

"I have no doubt of it."

"And am I wrong?"

"You may not be. Perhaps you have a subtler eye than some of us."

Lionel said, "Subtlety is the last quality I could claim, or that anyone would be likely to grant me. In other words, you're saying I am naïve."

"No, not naïve. Your outlook is framed by hope."

He said bitterly, "Not at the moment."

"The idea of a son meant a very great deal to you? It did to me once, though perhaps for different reasons. But your present unhappiness is not the point."

"I envy your detachment."

"No," Gilbert said, "you don't. *That* is the point." His gaze went to the broad slopes; higher up, a cloud was traveling crab-like across the green crest, moving toward Champney. The sky was clear all round; it devoured the sunlit slope and, passing on, left behind it a meadow as pure and bright as before. "I think I will go on," Gilbert said. "If they have come together again, I should feel my intrusion to be more marked. Tell them I will call this evening." He paused. "Give them my love."

Katharine's arrival to look after Victoria meant that Lionel could make arrangements for returning to England without anxiety on her behalf. He was to leave by the night train from Montreux on the day following the funeral of his son. Victoria was still under instructions to remain in bed; he bade goodbye to her in her room. The blinds had been lifted, and pale evening light lay softly on everything. The pellucidity of the air had a seeming permanence, as though issuing from no dawn, nor proceeding to any dusk.

"Cable me," she said, "as soon as you are home."

"Yes," Lionel said, "I will."

"And don't spend too much time at the mill. And be sure you have proper and regular meals."

"You're the one who must look after yourself."

"I shan't need to. Kitty will do that."

They did not speak for a time. From the next room came the sounds of Jeanette making things ready for Gilbert Fanshawe's return—her quick footsteps and the occasional creak of floorboards.

Victoria said, in a low voice, "Darling Lye, I'm so sorry."

"You have nothing to be sorry about."

"You do know what I mean, don't you?"

He ran his hand over hers, stroking and caressing it. "How can

you possibly reproach yourself? You gave him all any woman could give. The luck didn't run his way—that's all there was to it."

Her voice was strained. "But if I hadn't come out here, it might have done, mightn't it?"

"How could it?"

"There would have been English doctors, a hospital close by. I took him away from all that." She dropped her head, and her unbound hair fell over their joined hands. "You must blame me for it."

"I blame you for nothing. I don't believe those things would have made any difference. Babies die all over the world—in hospitals too. The very worst thing that could happen would be for you to start feeling guilty, and for no reason." He put his hands gently under her chin and lifted her head. Searching her eyes, he said, "I love you for your gaiety. I've lost my son. You wouldn't want me to lose my wife as well, would you?"

For answer, she offered her face to him to be kissed. He kissed her with a deep feeling of love, and of renewal. There was all this, and it startled him to know again how great a thing it was. He put his head down to her breast and felt, with pity and ecstasy, the dampness of her milk against his face.

She said, "Next time I will do things right. I learn from my mistakes. I promise I will do better."

"I don't want to change you, in any way."

She smiled at him. "How can you help doing so? I want to be what you want me to be."

"Then stay as you are."

She shook her head. "That would mean your changing, and you are too strong. And anyway I want you as you are, too." She looked at the ormolu clock above the fireplace. "You must go. One more kiss. I'll come back soon, I promise."

Gilbert had come up from the hotel, and Lionel said goodbye to him at the chalet. Katharine, however, said she would walk down to the station with him. He was prepared to go the long way, by the road, and was surprised when she stopped at the point where a short flight of steps, cut in the grass of the hillside and boarded in front for support, led to the path that, winding down through the open fields, provided a short cut to the village.

"Do you prefer this route?" he asked her.



"Why should I not?"

He gave her his hand to help her down the steps. "Because your skirt might get wet from the dew. And I thought you might feel it undignified."

"Which way would you have taken with Vicky?"

"We've been going by the road."

"Ah, but when she is herself?"

"This way. But you are not Vicky."

"No." She turned her dark eyes on him. "But perhaps we are less different than you think."

They were alone on the hillside, the chalets above them, the village even farther below. They could be seen from all sides, but the look she gave him was as effectively private as if they had been entirely secluded from view and, in the context of the open fields, the still luminous evening, all the more intimate. It embarrassed him so that he looked away from her.

Seeking to turn the conversation, he said awkwardly, "I am glad to be able to leave Vicky in your hands."

Katharine nodded. "You can do that safely."

They continued to walk down in silence, a silence stroked rather than broken by the swish of Katharine's skirt against the grass. Lionel was glad of this. Although he would not have admitted to an apprehension, he had the feeling that there would be relief in being surrounded again by people.

They reached the station with ten minutes to spare. There were already several waiting, and more were coming down from the hotels. A porter's wagon was piled high with baggage. Lionel saw his own cases among the rest.

"So little Jean got them down safely," he said. "I wasn't at all sure he would. He's so small a boy."

Katharine said, her voice harsh with urgency and yet, at the same time, pleading, "Do you think very badly of me for deserting Vicky?"

"Of course not."

"Don't say that," she said. Her lip was trembling. With an effort, she went on. "I can manage things now. I've faced things and I can answer them, control them. We shall be seeing a lot of each other, Lye, but there will be no need for you to worry. I won't say or do anything to upset you."

He said gently, "There's no need for you to say that."

"Just this once," she said, "I would like to be honest. I want you to understand why I've behaved as I have. This is not to ask for anything. It's just that I can't bear that you should think me cheap. That is vanity, I suppose."

"I don't think you at all cheap. I never have."

"But I've behaved cheaply. I've known it and not been able to help it. I regret that, but I don't regret the thing that made me act so. I shall never regret it. Lye, dear Lye, please tell me you understand."

Before there was time for him to answer, they heard the whistle of the train echoing through the tunnel that opened out of the station. The tension, the suffocating closeness, was shattered by it. There was no need, he knew, to answer her, no time or way for an answer to be made.

Instead he said, "The train's early."

"I'd forgotten," Katharine said. "This one stands in the station for five minutes. It has to wait for the train to come up from Montreux."

Her voice was casual again; more so, he thought, than his own. She saw him onto the train and offered her cheek for him to kiss without emotion. While the train stayed in the station he leaned out and they talked of various things; among them, he was to give her love to John when he saw him.

It was only as the train began to move that the conventional smile left her face and was replaced by sadness. She said, in a quiet voice, "I shall never tell you now."

There was a vividness in the scene; it was as though time, which was hastening their separation, somehow for an instant stood still, printing every detail on his mind. He noticed the raven's-wing curl of hair that fell across her face from under her bonnet, the whiteness of her hand against her breast, the tears brimming in her eyes. For the first time, too, he noticed her dress—that she was wearing a suit that she had worn two years ago, before her marriage to John; and it was this, more than anything, that made him want to lean from the window and cry out, "I understand. I understand!" But time had moved on again, and even if he had called he was not sure she would have heard him.

### 3

KATHARINE'S FIRST SON was born in the spring of the following year, and the second not much more than a year later. They were sturdy handsome children, resembling their father rather than their mother, and Victoria was an affectionate, possibly over-generous aunt to them. The two households became closely linked; they shared common interests, and the growth of the Burchall family provided an additional bond. There were very few points of difference, but one was provided by Lionel's works manager, Wilf Maine.

The high opinion of Wilf's abilities in connection with the mill which Lionel had had from the outset had been increased by the years of working with him and supplemented during those years by a growing personal affection. Wilf still spent more time at the mill than anywhere else, but in the hours he was away from there he was frequently to be found at Lionel's home.

Visiting, one gray windy day in autumn, a Sunday afternoon, John and Katharine were ushered into the sitting room, where Wilf was already sitting on a pouf beside the fire. He got to his feet awkwardly and stood looking earnestly at the fireplace while the newcomers were greeted and made welcome. He made and received his own greetings nervously and ungraciously and re-

sumed his preoccupation with the hearth. Then, a few minutes later, he said, "I'll have to be going."

"Not yet," Victoria said. "Surely you will stay and have tea?"

"Nay. I've promised I'd have tea with my aunt up in Longstreet."

Katharine said, "We are not pushing you out, I hope, Mr. Maine."

"No." He looked at her with concentration for an instant and then turned away, rubbing a hand across his chin. "I have to be going."

"I'll come out with you," Lionel said.

As the door closed behind them, Katharine said, "Vicky, how do you bear him? I really don't see how you can."

"We're very fond of Wilf."

"I can't think why! He has no conversation, and even less appearance. That suit, that dreadful tie, those boots! And that washable collar."

"You make him nervous," Victoria said. "Most people do. He's quite different when he's at ease."

"How different?" John asked. "Does he take his boots off?"

"I meant about conversation," Victoria smiled. "One gets used to his appearance."

"And do you get used to that voice as well?"

"He's very nice," Victoria said. "And he would do anything for Lye. It's made all the difference for him, having Wilf to depend on."

"Yes," John said. "He was lucky in getting him."

Katharine said, "That may be so. But one doesn't necessarily have to be on social terms with people who are useful in business."

From outside they heard the noise of a motor bicycle setting off, and a moment or two later Lionel came back.

He said, "He'll kill himself on that machine sooner or later. Do you know he does over sixty miles an hour on it?"

Victoria said, "Kitty has been telling me again how much she disapproves of him."

Lionel turned from the window, where he had been watching the course of the motor bicycle along the road. He smiled. "Do you, Kitty?"



"Well, you know I do."

"Tell me why. Yes, I know you've told me before. Tell me again."

"You don't understand," Katharine said. "I have nothing against him in his place. He very likely is, as John thinks, the best mill manager in the industry. My only objection is in seeing him out of his place, and he's out of his place here. Anyone can see that."

"I've told you," Victoria said, "you're judging by his manner when you are here as well. It's quite different when there are only us."

"You are proving my point. To be in place here is to be in place when you have visitors, not just when you are by yourselves! Perhaps you do put him more at ease at other times, but that simply shows you are taking the trouble. You don't have to make the same effort with other people who come here."

Lionel took out his cigarette case, offered cigarettes to Victoria and John and took one himself. He closed the case with a snap and put it back in his pocket. Taking a matchstriker from the table, he said, "Where is his place, then?"

"At Ligham," Katharine said. "With his aunt in Longstreet. Not here."

Lionel held the match to his wife's cigarette. "Some people have to come up the ladder," he said. "If the sign on the gate says 'No Admission,' you're inviting people to try breaking it down. Sooner or later, they will."

With some exasperation, Katharine said, "Ladders, gates! I'm not opposed to a certain degree of social flexibility. I'm entirely agreeable to making room for the man who's able and ambitious; but if he really is able and ambitious he will know how to respond to new conditions, how to adapt himself. He won't sit staring gloomily at the fire when he meets someone of a different class."

Lionel shook his head. "That's not good enough. Social flexibility doesn't mean courses in etiquette for the deserving poor. That perpetuates conflict. Real social flexibility implies taking as well as giving. Wilf is worth a hundred of the kind you have in mind. He has something to say, something to offer."

"What, pray?"

"You will have to get to know him," Lionel said, "to find that out."

"I can't believe it would be worth it," Katharine said. "I see no indications that it would."

Victoria took her arm. "Never mind Wilf, or social flexibilities. I want to show you some material I found in London. It's an Italian silk."

The men were left alone. "How are the boys?" Lionel asked.

"Noisy." John smiled reflectively. "Healthy, too."

"You should have brought them over."

"Nanny doesn't allow it. No disturbances in the afternoons. They have to have their naps out."

"I've been hearing things about you," Lionel said.

John smiled again. His face showed a faint curiosity only, as though he were aware of the main news but interested in the channels by which it had passed.

"What have you been hearing?"

"I met Lennox at the Exchange the other day. He told me you're to go on the board."

"Lennox?"

"Any truth in it?" Lionel asked.

John shrugged. "I was asked not to say anything until they made the official announcement. You know their passion for secrecy and doing things in the proper order. But that's only two or three days off, and anyway if Lennox knows . . ."

"I don't usually pay much attention to what I hear from that quarter, but this sounded very reasonable. Congratulations. I think it calls for a drink."

John said, as Lionel went to the sideboard, "Make it a small one. Kitty has a poor view of drinking in the afternoon."

Lionel poured brandies and soda. "She must be feeling bucked about it. How long have you known?"

"Only since Wednesday."

"Well, I'm delighted. I'm mildly surprised, too. That's not to cast any reflection on your sterling quality, old man. But Sickert's aren't exactly distinguished for encouraging new blood or young blood. On the board before thirty, without being a member of the family. It's unheard of."

"The family's thinning out, you know. The old ones are dying—the Colonel last year and old Andrew only three months ago. And the young ones aren't interested. Tony has given it up."

"I didn't know that. To do what?"

"To paint, in France. James is still in, but he's no good." Lionel nodded his agreement. "The only promising member of the younger generation went in opposition."

Lionel laughed. "They would never have stood for me! They were damn' glad to see me off the premises."

"Things have changed since." John sipped his brandy. "I'll bet they'd be glad to have you back if you'd come."

"And what should I do with the Leverton?"

"They would give you a good price for it. A very good price."

Lionel looked at John sharply. He said, "Are you here in your official capacity?"

John grinned "Don't be silly. Is that the way Sickert's works?"

"It wasn't; but, as you've been telling me, things have changed. You're not sounding me out, then?"

"No, I'm not sounding you out. I thought you might be interested to know how things stand. When you left, they thought you were bound to muck things up. There's a much more respectful tone in their voices when your name crops up now. And I know they're interested in the Leverton. I hear you've started production on a metal-polishing cloth?"

"Yes," Lionel said, "they must be interested. That was supposed to be under the wraps."

"They like the reputation the Leverton's got for high-quality specialized work. They don't have anything quite like it in the combine."

"I know that too."

"They wouldn't expect to get it cheap. But that's not the important point, Lye. What is important is that if you were to come back you would be in a lot stronger position than you had the prospect of before."

"Until I got their backs up again. Then they would isolate me, freeze me out."

"They wouldn't isolate you."

John spoke with emphasis, and Lionel took his meaning.

"No," he said, "I'd have you this time to back me up, wouldn't I?"

"In fifteen years," John said, "twenty at the outside, you'd be running Sickert's. That's certain. And then you could do what you liked."

"I do what I like now."

"Not with the resources of Sickert's behind you."

"The point is doing it now. Twenty years? What will I have settled for in twenty years? And meantime see them put their fat paws on the Leverton? It's not worth it, John—not at any price, not under any conditions."

There was a silence. In it could be heard the scatter of rain, the tap of a tendril of Virginia creeper blown across the window-panes by the wind. Dusk was drawing in fast, as though hurried across the sky by the impatient air.

"You may be right," John said. "When I look at things from your point of view, I can see that." He added, with an illuminating humility, "I'm too prone to see things from where I stand. And I would have liked us to be together again."

"We may be yet."

"I don't think so." He hesitated before continuing. "I can't keep up with you, and I can't follow you."

Lionel laughed. "What does that mean, Johnny?"

John grinned in a shamefaced manner. He began to make some explanation, but the ladies returned and he relapsed gratefully into silence.

In January they went as usual to La Jatte. The procedure now was for Katharine and Victoria to travel in advance with the children, and for the husbands, if they could find the time, to come later. The two sisters took a suite together at the Hôtel Édouard; they each had a personal maid, and there was Nanny Kilter to look after the infants.

There had been a thaw shortly before they arrived, and the scene was wretched; snow lay in patches, soft and dirty, turning to slush, and the hillside showed broad vertical streaks of green against the white. The skating rink behind the hotel had reverted to gravel, specked with small boulders of melting ice. Clouds crossed the sky between Cubly and Jaman, gray, ragged, trailing

a stinging cold rain. In the mornings, disconsolate winter-sporters looked out at the scene of desolation before making arrangements to travel to Château d'Oex or Rochers de Naye in search of the snow.

The sisters stayed in the village, alternating between the hotel and Chalet Fanshawe. They took the children, in the first place, to visit their grandfather, but afterward they left them in Nanny's care. Although Gilbert did his best to fill the role he thought expected of him, talking to the children, even getting down on the floor to play with them, it was plain that his heart was not in it. The brief time, with his wife and his own children, when he had fancied the greatest joy might lie in the discipline of human love was long over, and as he grew old he began to doubt not only the reality but the memory of the joy. For adults he could still feel a civilized moderate affection. Children made inordinate demands, and he feared and somewhat disliked them for it.

Lionel came to La Jatte simultaneously with the return of the snow. The little train stopped at Fontanivent to have a snowplow fixed in front of it, and, with the blizzard sweeping in over the Vaudois hills, darkening the train windows with a crust of white, he wondered whether they would be able to reach La Jatte before conditions became impossible. As he got out of the carriage when they finally arrived, the snow lashed his face with thorns of frost. He told the porter to bring his luggage over and himself ran across the station square and down the slight ramp to the shelter of the hotel lobby.

He found Victoria in bed, with a breakfast tray on the locker beside her. She looked at him with surprise and delight.

"Lye, darling! I didn't expect you. How did you manage to get away so soon?" She held her arms out to him.

He said, "I'm all snowed up. Wait till I get some of these things off."

"I'll order breakfast for you." She picked up the telephone and did so. Beckoning to him again, she said, "Now, tell me how you managed it."

He came to the bedside and kissed her. "There was a rush trip to Paris—a big order for map cloth. I decided it would be silly

to go as far as that and not come on here. There was no time to get a letter off. I suppose I could have sent a telegram, but I thought I would surprise you instead."

She moved against him. "I'm glad. Then John hasn't come with you?"

"No. I spoke with him before I left. He's hoping to get here by the end of the week."

The door communicating with the next room opened, and Katharine came in, wearing a silk wrap over her nightdress.

She said, "Lye! I thought I heard your voice."

"I've just been explaining," Lionel said, "that John can't get away until Friday."

Katharine laughed. "I shall rely on Vicky sharing you a little with me. So far everything has been terribly dull. No snow, and the Tulenkovs are not here yet."

Lionel nodded toward the windows. A diagonal line ran across each pane; to the right of it the glass was caked with snow. "Apparently I've brought the snow. And I saw the Tulenkovs' man in the train. What's his name?"

"Old Nicholas? He will have come to get things ready, so they will probably be arriving tomorrow."

"I was proposing to stay in bed this morning," Victoria said, "but everything has quite changed. Is Hilda in the sitting room?"

"Yes," Katharine said. "Do you want her?"

"Ask her to run my bath, would you?" Victoria climbed out of bed as Katharine left the room, and Lionel handed her wrap to her. She took it from him, but did not immediately put it on. Instead, with a swift movement, she came into his arms. Her flesh warmed his fingers through the thin, slipping silk.

She whispered, "I'm so glad, so glad."

They were confined to the hotel that day; the snowstorm did not abate until near evening. Next morning the skies were clear; the cloud was below La Jatte, spreading like a silver waveless sea from above Glion to the snowy shores of the Savoy Alps. The new white freshness was everywhere. The air was crisp and buoyant; snow that fell, from time to time, from branches or the edges of roofs, seemed to sing through it. All was crystal.

Preparing to bob down from Champney, Katharine saw and drew the attention of the others to the minuscule horses drawing the tiny sledge through the toy village beneath them, and they watched their progress until they turned into the drive of the Chalet Russe. The jingle of the horses' bells came up, faint but distinct, tinged with the day's sharp stillness. From the chimneys blue wood smoke curled up, solid-seeming until it melted against the brighter forget-me-not blue of the sky.

Alex and Trina were out on the slopes within the hour, and in the afternoon the General joined them, lugeing down with a boy's abandon. On his insistence, Katharine, Victoria and Lionel went back with them for tea in the chalet. They crowded in front of the big fireplace in the sitting room, laughing, while the servants lit the lamps.

"I love this kind of light!" Victoria exclaimed "So much warmer and softer than the electricity."

"So do I," the General said. He picked up from the table a lamp carved from pink-veined marble, delicately shaped, with fluted sides, and held it up toward Victoria's face in the manner of a courtier. "It is the only true light in which to see a lovely woman."

Alex laughed. He had grown very tall, two or three inches taller than his father. Since the previous year he had begun to broaden also, but he still looked thin. His manner was more nervous and impatient than it had been, and he spoke English very fast, the words tumbling from his lips.

"A wise merchant," he said, "buys under a strong light. The stronger the better."

"But we are not talking of merchants," the General said, "or of buying."

He spoke reprovingly, but with the underlying affection that always marked his attitude toward his children. He spoiled them and, apparently, had always done so. But the spoiling, Lionel thought, had done little damage. They were high-mettled, conscious of their youth and strength and abilities, but amiable and lacking in arrogance. They represented, he felt, a bright future for their country.

Trina now said, "But, Peppi, we should have the electric light put in here. I think it is the only place in La Jatte without it."

"Very true," Tulenkov said. "The *laiterie*, the house of the *blanchisseuse*, the cottages on the hill, they all blaze with electricity."

"You know I meant houses similar to this," she said indignantly. "People will think of us as barbarous Russians still living in the Dark Ages."

Lionel interposed. "Surely it is scarcely worth while having the installation made when you spend so small a part of the year here."

"Voilà," Tulenkov said, "*c'est juste*."

"Ah," Trina said, "it is not that. It is merely Peppi being romantic. At home he is not permitted to be reactionary, so he defies us here."

Tulenkov turned away, smiling. "I will escape from this insolence," he said, "and go and feed my birds. They take me as I am, a mere provider, and do not wish to change me."

"Can I come with you, Peppi?" Victoria asked.

"Of course. You will charm them, Vicky, and I will feed them."

Lionel got her coat, and the three of them went out to the garden by way of the veranda. The day was fading. The sky was a deepening blue except where a narrow band of cloud, thrown like a silk scarf across the peaks of the distant mountains, was flushed with purple. The snow, worked into curious shapes on benches and garden ornaments, and lying thickly everywhere, took on hard, stony outlines.

"The birds will have gone to roost," Lionel said.

From the pocket of his overcoat, Tulenkov took the bag into which, on their way out, he had put cakes from the stand.

"They will wake up for supper," he said.

He whistled through his teeth, a series of short trills vaguely resembling bird song. A blackbird flew down from the fir, followed by another and then by a thrush. Others came—robins, finches, a magpie with its underwings flashing blue and white. Tulenkov crumbled the cakes and tossed the crumbs to the birds. He gave some of the cakes to Victoria and Lionel to do the same,



but the birds continued to surround him, paying little attention to what the others offered. He stood still, and they alighted on his hands. Their constant fluttering movement marked the intensity of his stillness.

With a sudden expansive gesture he tossed away the last of the crumbs.

"There," he said, "you have had your supper. Go now to your perches." He turned to Lionel and Victoria and took an arm of each. "And we can go to our tea. Tell me, Lionel, how is cotton?"

"We still manage to make a living," Lionel said, "and so do the banks. We opened up an extension with another four hundred looms last summer."

"Your husband is a great man, Vicky," Tulenkov said. "He is a samurai of commerce. I would like to take him back with me to Russia. We could learn from him."

"Some day," Lionel said, "I should like to visit your country, General."

"But that is excellent! What could be better? You must both come and stay with us. When can you come?"

Lionel smiled. "Not this year, I'm afraid. I can't possibly spare the time."

"If not this year, then next year. With so long notice there will be no difficulty in your arranging things. Come in the spring—that is our best time."

"We'll see," Lionel said. "A lot can happen in a year. But we're deeply grateful for the invitation."

"That is your Western year," Tulenkov said, "not ours. In Russia, nothing happens in ten years." He smiled. "That is not quite true, of course. We move faster than we did at one time. We are learning."

The notes of a piano came out across the snow, and as they reached the veranda they heard a young girl's voice—Trina singing. She was singing in French, a sad little *chanson* about a girl in summer walking in a garden as the evening drew on and thinking of her lover, who had walked there with her in the brightness of the morning but who had gone now, to the wars. She had a deep, clear voice, a true contralto, and she sang clearly and truly, with no emotional stress. They went in quietly and stood by the door,

listening to her, and, looking at Tulenkov, Lionel saw that his eyes glistened with tears.

He did not travel back with John, whom Katharine had persuaded to stay for a further week. He was due to leave by the Friday night train and when, in the morning, they found the village grayly enveloped in *brouillard*, they decided to spend the day down in Montreux. Victoria would see him off at night and then catch the late train back to La Jatte. There was some suggestion of the Burchalls accompanying them, but in the end they stayed; they had been asked to take the children up to the Chalet Russe—Minna and the General were both delighted with them.

Montreux, although below the clouds, was dull and gloomy, under the threat of rain which, apart from a few odd spots, did not come. They lunched with friends who were staying at the Grand Hotel at Territet and in the afternoon—as heavy and unpromising as the morning—walked along the front to Chillon. They had tea at a café there, and Lionel suggested taking a cab back.

"Can't we walk?" Victoria asked. "I would rather walk."

"I thought you seemed tired."

She shook her head. "No, not at all."

He paid the bill and they made their way down again to the lakeside. The path was deserted; they walked side by side under the bare firs with no sound except the occasional noise of traffic on the road above the railway line.

"You're very quiet," Lionel said.

"Am I?" She smiled. "I wish you weren't going back tonight."

"How long are you staying on? Is it a fortnight?"

"Not so long." She paused. "I wish I had arranged to come with you, but it is too late to change now."

He said with some surprise, "And leave Kitty alone with the children?"

"Well, John is here. They could return with him."

He said teasingly, "Don't tell me you have become so attached to Manchester that Switzerland palls on you after little more than a week."

She smiled, but a preoccupied, unhappy expression remained

on her face. She said, "Sometimes I feel sad here—sadder than I ever do in England."

She was wearing a gray striped tweed suit, with toque, muff and stole all in gray squirrel fur. Gray was everywhere that afternoon; sky, mountains, the glassy waters of the lake, all were gray and somber. Lionel put a hand on her muff.

"What makes you sad?" he asked her.

"Nothing," she said. "There is nothing to be sad about."

It was not until they were nearly in Montreux that he learned what was troubling her. He said some casual thing about their holidays in the summer, supposing that they would be going with the Burchalls to Scarborough; it had been tentatively arranged some months before.

Victoria said quickly, "We shall have to make different plans."

"Why?"

"Because of Kitty. She is to have another baby."

"Is she? Why didn't you tell me when we were at La Jatte? You will have to congratulate her for me."

"She has not told John yet. She wants to be sure. But I think it's sure enough."

She did not hide the bitterness in her voice.

Lionel said, "We have to be glad for her, Vicky. And nephews and nieces are better than nothing."

She echoed, "Nothing."

"We can't do anything about it. The only thing to do is accept it and not brood over it."

She turned to him. Her eyes were wide in appeal, an appeal so great, so naked, that it put a gulf between them, as though she were suing for an undeserved and unlikely mercy.

"Let me have another child," she said.

"It's impossible," he told her. "You know it's impossible."

She shook her head violently. He saw that she was grimacing, as though with pain. She spoke in a low, flat, earnest voice, as though by rote.

"I want a child," she said. "I'll take the risk."

"Three doctors," Lionel said, "two of them among the best in their profession. They've all said the same thing. The risk is too great."

"Let me judge that!"

"I can't. Anything else, but not that."

"Don't you understand," she said, "it's the one thing I could give you which would count? It's what you want above all—it's the whole purpose and culmination of everything you're doing. If I can give you that, nothing else matters. And if I can't give it to you . . ." She broke off for a moment. When she resumed, her voice was higher, more sharply edged. "Do you want me to feel that you did wrong to marry me—that you should have married a woman who could give you sons? Because I do feel like that already, and it must grow worse year by year."

There was a bench nearby, facing the water. He led her to it and sat down with her. She was trembling now, and he took her hands from the muff and chafed and soothed them with his own.

"Listen," he said, "I shall never feel I did wrong to marry you. I shall never feel anything but gratitude for that. There can be something a great deal worse than not having a son."

"What?"

"Having a son and hating him; and if he made me lose you I would hate him. I would hate him, and hate myself for having let you do it. You can't want that for me, Vicki."

She did not say anything for a time. He felt the physical agitation die away as he continued to stroke her hands.

At last she said, "It's so unfair for you—John having all these children, and you without any, without hope."

"Hope's a hardy grower," he said. "I shall never be without it. There are all kinds of things to hope for, all kinds of wonders."

"But this is different."

Although she was quieter now, there was no less wretchedness and despair in her voice.

He said, "If we had a son, it would make you happy?"

"Yes. Oh, Lye, yes!"

"Then we'll have one. We can adopt a boy."

She looked at him uncertainly. She was estimating, he guessed, his own needs for happiness, unsure whether he could be satisfied by a child of another's generation. Realizing this, and knowing how justified her suspicion was, he felt a rush of love, deeper, not weaker, for being mixed with pity. He was the stronger of the

two, and his strength was best used in protecting her. If an adoption would give her the assurance of love, that was all that counted.

"Do you want that?" she asked.

"I've been thinking about it for some time," he said. "But I thought you might not like the idea."

She nodded slowly. "I do like it. How does one do things like that?"

"There's no great difficulty. The solicitors can ferret out the details."

She was still unsure. The idea had allayed her unhappiness, but it had bewildered her.

"How soon?" she asked him.

"There's no hurry. It's something one needs to think about."

She said quickly, "Then you're not certain?"

"Neither of us is. If we were certain, we ought not to be. It's not the sort of thing to decide without giving thought to it. Not just for ourselves. There's the child to think of as well."

Her voice was quiet. "How much thought?"

"Enough for you to be quite sure. In the autumn—if you feel the same way in the autumn, I'll make the arrangements. Will that do?"

"All right. In the autumn."

War came while the year was still in blossom. The newspapers, which had been full of the riots in Dublin, suddenly turned their attention to the east, and to the long fuse which through the hot summer weeks had been smoldering toward the moment of explosion. In a few more days the trail of sparks had run through and the world was in flames. Pictures gave reality to the incredible: photographs of the rolling caissons, dogs drawing Belgian machine guns into action, British soldiers cheering as they boarded the transports. It was a time of swiftly and savagely shifting perspectives; Ireland, labor troubles, the Suffragettes were forgotten even before the casualty lists began.

After the first shock, Lionel had no doubt as to his necessary course of action, but it was the beginning of November before he felt able to turn intention into fact. He came back to Sten-

bridge on a bright, blustery Saturday afternoon and found Wilf Maine there. Victoria was busy with embroidery and Wilf was studying a copy of *Illustrated War News* with frowning intentness. They both ceased their occupations and turned to Lionel as he came into the sitting room.

"Well?" Victoria asked.

"Everything in order," he told her. "I'm to report in ten days' time."

"You're cracked," Wilf said. He was breathing heavily, nervously. "For God's sake, Vicky, how did you come to let him do a thing like that?"

She said, "It's what he wants."

"That's putting it a bit high," Lionel said.

"Is it?" She smiled. "Don't you want it?"

Lionel said, "We can't have what we want or do what we want these days. None of us can. The only thing to do is make the best of a bad job."

"Is that what you call the best?" Wilf asked.

"If I had your convictions," Lionel said, "it might not be. As it is . . . I think it probably is."

"What convictions do you have?" Wilf pressed him. "Treaty obligations, gallant little Belgium, all that stuff? Are those your convictions?"

"Not exactly." He smiled. "Mind you, I see some point in them."

"You see what they tell you to see."

"Well, I suppose I do. And what you tell me also. You're lucky, Wilf—you see one thing clearly, and all the rest are shadows you can ignore."

"I can see what's common sense. It's all right for them that believe all that bloody rubbish to go out and fight for it. Good luck to them. But you can't tell me you believe it."

"Not all of it, anyway."

"Look, there's no *need* for you to get yourself mixed up in it. You're the head of a business with government contracts. Asquith wants to keep you there more than Kitchener wants to put you in khaki."

"For the time I'm going to be away," Lionel said, "you can

manage as well as I could. From now on, it's all straightforward production. We make what they tell us to make, and don't argue."

"And what the hell happens if I go and enlist?"

He looked ludicrously enraged. Victoria and Lionel both laughed. Wilf stared at them furiously for a moment, and then laughed himself.

"Come with me, Wilf," Lionel said. "We'll go together. If the Government wants the cloth, the Government can run the Leverton. We'll make do with death or glory."

"I'll save my fighting for when it's time to fight," Wilf said. "I don't reckon it's time yet, and I don't reckon to fight other workingmen who've never done me harm. And fight against the Germans, on the side of the Russians? You know what conditions are like for the working classes in Russia."

"Yes," Lionel said, "I know. But the Russian soldiers seem to be doing better against the Germans than our lot. They aren't saving their fighting for later. And, you know, they may be right, Wilf. A lot of things can change during a big war. The forces of progress may stride ahead in Russia."

"Forces of progress stride ahead in a war? Do you see any signs of them striding ahead here? I tell you, war's the best excuse the ruling classes ever have of putting the workers back under. That's what they're doing now, and that's what they plan to go on doing. But they're not putting me under with them."

Lionel said, "Oughtn't you to show your solidarity?"

"Not with corpses. And besides, there's the future to think of."

"I agree with you about that. I'm glad I can leave the Leverton in good hands for the duration."

Wilf looked at him. It was a look Lionel had seen before, which at once embarrassed and warmed him: there was such a concentration of trust in it, an almost yearning humility and affection. Overwhelmingly it answered the doubts that he had sometimes felt—and that John and Katharine had more than once voiced—as to the various kinds of latitude, both socially and in regard to the mill, which he had granted to him. He could be sure of Wilf. There would never be a man of whom he could be as sure.

Wilf said, "If I thought me being still here made the difference

to you, about joining up, I—I'd hand my notice in right away."

Lionel shook his head. "It's not that."

Victoria said, "There's no good in arguing, Wilf. He's made his own choice. There's nothing you or I can do about it."

It was as though, in that instant, Wilf became aware of Victoria—of a need and a loss that matched his own. He gave her a wondering look, a glance of recognition and sympathy. Then he said clumsily, "I'd better be going. You'll have things to do."

"I've still got ten days."

"All the same, I'm off. See you Monday."

Lionel nodded. Wilf went toward the door. As he reached it, he stopped. He said, "Mr. Burchall's not going, then?"

"I don't think so."

"He doesn't have to go," Wilf said, "but you do."

"There's a difference," Lionel said. "He's a family man."

When Wilf had gone, accompanied by the usual diminuendo racket of motor-bicycle exhaust, Lionel said, smiling, "I wonder how long Wilf will be able to go on persuading himself he is a worker? I'm going to make him a director when this lot is over. I wonder how he'll get round that?"

She said, in a dry quiet voice, "So it's come. I knew it had to. It doesn't make things any easier, though."

She was sitting on the sofa, in front of the fire, her embroidery loose on her lap. She had on a velveteen house gown with long, close sleeves and buttons in the same material but of a lighter shade. Lace frills were gathered at the wrists and neck. She reminded him of a woman in a Dutch painting—a Vermeer, he thought—cool and upright, and patient and suffering.

He said gently, "What else could I do, Vicky love? There was no choice, really."

"The same choice as for others."

It was part statement, part question.

"We all have different choices," he said. "At least, things make our choices different. But there isn't much we can do about them."

She said, "I've been thinking about Peppi. He will be fighting, won't he? And Alex too, probably. But fighting is Peppi's job."

"Maybe. Not Alex's."



"He's a young man. You're thirty-three."

"It's a ripe age."

Her eyes appealed to him. "If you'd been like John, a family man, it would have been different. You wouldn't have thought you had to go."

"That's not true. I said that on John's behalf. It would have made no difference to me."

"Then you think John's a coward?"

He felt tired; tired of all the pressures, the claims and the demands. They were equally irrelevant and equally wearying whether they came from the vast impersonal propaganda machine or from those one loved. Outside that mesh, everything was simple and untroubling.

"I don't think John's a coward. And I don't think I'm a hero."

"Then why?" She looked up, her forehead wrinkled with the need to understand. "Why?"

He sighed. "I can't explain why. Sweetheart, you will simply have to accept things. There aren't always reasons."

She dropped her head. He sat beside her and pulled her in against his shoulder. The fire glowed in front of them, a part of a succession of days past that would soon be broken. They sat in silence and he was content that time should hold off, leaving them here together. He was sorry when she spoke, and the interval slipped away like a bubble.

"The adoption," she said, "I suppose that's off now?"

"Till the war's over," he said. He stroked her hair. "There will be plenty of poor little devils looking for homes when the war's over."

## 4

DURING THE HOME LEAVE that he was given during the long-drawn-out battle of the Somme, Lionel was aware, for the first time, of a weakening of confidence, a feeling not so much of fear as of helplessness. He had known both fear and helplessness many times during the eighteen months he had spent in the trenches, but those feelings had been localized; fear for this half hour, helplessness in this place. This new thing was more subtle and pervasive, and it grew worse as the train carried him across the safe wheat-waving acres of England.

Losses, of course, had been heavy in the preceding weeks; his own company had lost nearly half its other ranks and more than half of the officers. The casualties included people to whom he had been bound by the broad bands of shared experiences, and experiences so much more intimate and degrading and terrifying than anything their earlier lives had offered. Young Cleary, for instance, whose blood had jetted over him like an angry fountain when a shell splinter hit him in the neck; he had known him more closely than he knew Victoria, and loved him almost as much. And yet he had not mourned for his death and did not now. He had expected it. None of their deaths had surprised him.

The death he had never expected was his own. Moments of fear apart, he had always felt sure of his own indestructibility.

Death, from one instant to the next, might take his friends, but would not look for him. It was this assurance that he now felt to be challenged. The challenge had come in the encounter, on his way down from the line, with Spenser, Perce-Savage's adjutant.

"The last survivor," Spenser had said. "What does it feel like?"

"Not quite the last."

"From the original battalion. Before this show there were only you and Wilbraham, and Willy's just gone back with a hole in his chest that will call for very careful plumbing. That leaves you."

"There's always one that gets missed," he said. "Law of averages."

But the thought had stuck like a burr that, with brooding's steady friction, worked its way inward. Not all the losses had been casualties; Geary, for instance, had been transferred to the Engineers, and Thompson, after a minor leg wound, had gone to the Second Battalion. But one way or another, they had gone, and he had not had a scratch. Cleary had been out for over a year and unwounded, until a spinning shard of metal had cut his throat and dropped his sullen body like the carcass of a beast bled in the abattoir.

"I bear a charmed life," Cleary had said, drinking whisky out of a rusty enamel mug. "It's my medallion of the Virgin that does it—blessed by the Pope and warmed for a month between the breasts of sweet Bridget. I'm thinking of having her put them into production. She could hatch a dozen at once with no trouble at all."

And Cleary was dead. The splinter had smashed the thin gold chain which carried the medallion and buried one end of it in the gaping wound. Lionel had taken it off the body and wiped it clean. He had sent it later to Cleary's mother.

During the course of the leave he tried to win clear of this unease and at times succeeded. He was most successful during visits to the Burchalls, who had moved into a bigger house only a mile or two from Stenbridge. His three nephews were growing up fast. Richard, at four, was an active, handsome boy, who dominated the quieter Stephen and in his turn was bullied and cajoled by little Lionel. It was an odd relationship that existed

between the eldest and the youngest. Lionel, who had justified the name he had been given by growing a fine crop of fair hair, also differed from his brothers in giving signs of being much more intelligent, and his intelligence was of an inquiring, mischievous nature. Less than two years old, he spoke fluently and with a surprising precision; and Richard appeared to rejoice in his knowl- ingness and to encourage it.

All three were delighted by Lionel's visits and made much of him. And they gave him a great deal in return—a renewal of the sense of continuity, a brightening of the future. However long the war dragged on, it could not possibly last long enough to devour these bright spirits. They belonged to the world of peace which would come afterward. He felt at times, watching them play, an exultant love, a bursting out of joy and triumph.

He carried them upstairs on his back and deposited each in turn, shrieking with laughter, on one of the three truckle beds in the nursery. Nanny Kilter acquiesced in the breakdown of discipline—she had a great respect for the military and a nephew out in Palestine—and allowed him to stay afterward while she supervised their prayers. He listened, unsmiling, and went downstairs to the drawing room, his heart at once light with hope and heavy with emotion.

"Look what they've done to your collar!" Katharine exclaimed. "You shouldn't let them rumple you like that, Lye."

Motherhood had done handsomely by Katharine; her figure remained firm and erect, a little plumped out, perhaps, but not to its detriment, her skin was clearer and her whole demeanor reflected a consciousness of dignity and beauty. She dressed more stylishly now than Victoria did, and had developed a liking for simple gold ornaments. She was wearing one that Lionel had not seen before, a heavy gold cross resting on the curve of her bosom. He remembered for an instant the sad, passionate girl who had stared up at him in the station of La Jatte. There was nothing left of her now.

Victoria, on the other hand, had grown thinner—she looked some years older than her sister—and was not always as careful of her appearance as she had been. The lines of worry on her forehead were more marked and left their traces even when she was

not frowning. She frowned a little as Katharine spoke. He went and sat by her, smiling to her.

"No permanent damage," he said. "Doesn't little Lye say his prayers well? He's a staggering chap all round."

"Brandy?" John asked. "Or whisky?"

"Whisky," he said. "No, nothing in it."

"Used to having it neat," John said. "I suppose you would be. You would need to have it neat in the conditions you have out there."

The statement expressed an uncertainty, a wish to know. During this leave John had more than once led the conversation round to this point. He had himself recently volunteered for service and was expecting, from day to day, to be told when to report. Knowing this, Lionel still refused to be drawn. John, in any case was to be commissioned in the Service Corps. He might not go to France at all, and if he did it would not be to the France which Lionel had so recently left—to which he must soon return.

He said, "Your appetites coarsen—whisky's only a part of it."

"Is it?" Katharine asked. She smiled, but there was a small ring of steel in her voice. "What other appetites, then?"

He missed the innuendo. "Do you know the loveliest food in the world?" he said. "Hot, greasy bacon, with a hunk of not too stale bread and a mug of sweet tea." He laughed. "To be served with wet feet."

Victoria said, "I don't think Kitty was talking about food. She meant the girls in the *estaminets*."

"What? Well, that's not coarsening, surely. Aren't French girls supposed to be the best?"

"Don't boast," Victoria said. "Leave us to the decent obscurity of our suspicions."

He said, more seriously, "There's some truth in the tales, of course. It's true of some men. But I honestly don't think their womenfolk should blame them. Pity would be more appropriate. It's fear, I think—fear of dying or being badly wounded—that drives them." He added quickly, "Not that we aren't all afraid from time to time, but some fellows can't seem to get over it even when they're out of the line."

The thought occurred to him as he said this that he might no longer have the immunity which had been his in the past. But the recollection of the children in their nursery still protected him.

Katharine said lightly, "Well, Vicky has been told of your excuse, should you ever be found out."

"I don't think there's anything to find out," Victoria said.

Lionel lifted her hand and kissed it. "Thank you for the vote of confidence."

"Yes," Katharine said, "you should thank her."

Near the end of this leave, he took Victoria and Wilf out for luncheon at the Midland Hotel. They had coffee afterward in the Winter Garden. It was strange to sit in the heavy cane chairs again, surrounded by the ornamental trees and shrubs, and the climbing plants twining upward out of the familiar tobacco-scented atmosphere. The pianist was a woman; that was changed. But what was unchanged was more in evidence, and he recognized things, one by one, with fresh accession of pleasure.

It was strange for Wilf too, he realized, but the strangeness was of a different order. Wilf had never previously been here—although he was in sole charge of the Leverton he had made almost no alteration in his way of life—and he was plainly uncomfortable. He sat forward on the edge of his chair, like a child at a treat he is not sure he will like, and clutched his coffee cup with great determination. Lionel sat back, putting his foot up over his other knee.

"Well," he said, "what's good on the home front?" The question was directed to Wilf.

Wilf drank from his cup and rattled it back into the saucer.

"What do you expect?" he asked.

"The last lot of maps we were issued," Lionel said, "were printed on our cloth. I could tell by the weave. The little Number Seven—throwing the same flaw as ever."

"She ought to be scrapped," Wilf said, "but you can't get replacements."

"She's still good enough. The cloth wouldn't tear—I tried it. And you don't look for the best craftsmanship in Army gear."

Wilf said bitterly, "You don't look for it in aught these days. And it wouldn't do you any good to look."

"How are you for hands?"

"I can get women."

"What's wrong with that?"

"It depends what you want them for. We've had to put them on bale-breaking."

"The main thing," Lionel said, "is that you're managing to keep things running. And running very well, too. We're making a lot of money, Wilf."

"We're giving good value for it, too, which is more than some can say. You heard about the trouble at the Whitedale?"

"Some rumors."

"Two hundred thousand yards of twill sent back as substandard—six weeks' production. And there's no telling how many lots they managed to get through before someone used his eyes on that batch."

"That's a serious charge to make, especially against a Sickert mill."

Wilf looked at him. "Has Mr. Burchall said anything to you about it?"

"No, he didn't mention it."

Wilf laughed. "I'm not surprised, either. I hear he's going into uniform?"

"That's right."

"He'll look well in it."

"Leave him alone, Wilf," Lionel said. "John's all right. You would like him well enough if you and he got to know one another properly."

Wilf had the look on his face which showed when he knew he was trespassing beyond permissible limits—a wary truculence, half humble, half defiant.

"That's not so likely," he said, "is it? Unless you're still planning to bring him into the Leverton when the war's over."

Lionel smiled. "I don't think he would be interested. He's doing too well where he is."

"I'm glad, then." Wilf paused awkwardly. "We can do some

big things with the Leverton when things are right again. I've got some ideas."

Lionel responded to the undercurrent of meaning—the boy's appeal to the leader of his gang, the jealous cry for exclusion of the others.

"We'll use them, Wilf," he said. "We're going to do great things together."

Still awkward, Wilf examined his watch. It looked massive, especially on his small wrist, and had a variety of controls and subdials. He had recently bought it and was very much attached to it.

"I must be getting back," he said. "Thanks for the dinner, Lye. Ta-ta, Vicky. I'll be seeing you before you go?"

"Yes, of course. Goodbye, Wilf."

They watched him cross the lounge to the door. He encountered a waiter and they each dodged the same way to let the other pass. Victoria began to smile and then composed her face in case he should turn and notice.

Lionel said, "He'll always be a bit *outré*, but it will rub off to some extent in time. He's better than he used to be, as it is. A few years ago this place would have petrified him."

"Dear Wilf," Victoria said. "He's gone now. We can smile. I would hate to hurt his feelings."

"Will you have more coffee?"

"Please. Where do they get their sugar from?"

Lionel called the waiter and ordered fresh coffee. He said, "Wilf is my armor against fate. He sets my mind at rest."

"Wilf? Not me, then."

He smiled. "Because of you. I know that if anything goes wrong out there you will have Wilf to depend on. You can't think how important that is to me at times."

She said, "You must not talk about things going wrong."

He hesitated. He stared at her face, reading the familiar lines that yet had changed so much in the past two years. He wanted to lay no burden on her beyond those she was already forced to carry, but at the same time he saw her yearning to share his thoughts, his life, his nightmares even.

He said, "I've been a bit miserable this time, haven't I? I could



tell you knew. We had a rough time, but I think the worst is over."

She said with pain, "You have to go back. Tomorrow."

"It probably won't be so bad. In fact, I'm sure it won't. This last thing shook my confidence, but I'm all right again now."

She said, "When you first went out there, I thought every day there would be—bad news. As time went by it was different. I began to think that because you had been all right for so long you would go on being all right."

He smiled. "That's rather the way I looked at things, too."

Her lip trembled. "Lately it's been bad again. I've had some awful dreams. Dreams in which people quite casually speak to me as a widow and—" she shook her head—"and I don't argue with them, or tell them they're mistaken. Because I'm sure it's true."

He said, "We pick up each other's thoughts, perhaps—each other's anxieties, anyway. Don't they call it telepathy? I promise you from now on you will only pick up optimistic thoughts from me."

She said, "You can't promise that. I wish you could."

"I'll survive this war," he said. "Without any doubt. This is a moment of certainty. The next time you meet those people in your dreams, tell them that. The war's not going to last long enough to put you into weeds. Tell them that."

"I will." She smiled. "I will tell them."

Although, of course, there were times when fear returned—moments of hopelessness and agony—he did not succumb again to that deeper enveloping dread which had fallen on him after the Somme. He was like a runner who has regained his wind. But he had known it long enough to have the fear of fear and an awareness that if it came again he was lost.

In the spring of 1917, while the battalion was out of the line, he met one of their old officers, Roger Dingwell, who had transferred to the Royal Flying Corps. Dingwell, who had moved up fast since he joined it, was an enthusiast for his new corps and was looking for officers. He and Lionel had always got on well together and when, this time, they parted, it was with Dingwell's assurance that he was going to have him for the R.F.C.

To Lionel's astonishment the posting came through, and within a month. There was home leave, training at a home base, a long succession of days and weeks counted out of the slaughter that still went on in France. And no return now to the blood and filth of that battle, the never ending wretchedness and misery.

"I told you," he said to Victoria, lifting her up. "I'm indestructible." He stared up at her gravely. "I shall never stand to again with my boots full of icy slush. It's finally over."

"You're still a soldier."

"In a different war!" he said. "An entirely different war."

The difference was much greater than he had thought it would be. After trench warfare he was never unaware of the luxury of sleeping in a bed, in a dry and reasonably warm hut, of having hot meals at regular intervals, of being able to shave every day and with hot water. And apart from the surrounding life, the actual process of combat was so much cleaner and more comfortable. There were disadvantages—it could be bitterly cold despite the protective clothing—but walking out across the field, climbing into his plane and roaring eastward across the sky could only seem, after what he had known, a civilized way of going into battle. The fighting itself had a formal air; even in dogfights, spinning through unexpected quarters of the sky, confused and bewildered by the kaleidoscope of other planes, there was a feeling of belonging to something that made up, if one could but get outside the immediate and watch it, a pattern. When, on one of his early engagements, two of the members of his own squadron touched, collided, sank like an oily sun toward the ground, it was as though there were some significance in it. Turning back with the others toward their home field, he thought: In this kind of fighting, a man might believe in God.

He did well as an airman, too. He shot down his first enemy on his third sortie, his second just over a week later. It was autumn again; mists breathed from the fields of France. Above the mists there was sunshine and the bright cold air. Flying was an exhilaration; sometimes he looked forward to it for hours before an operation.

John came to the airdrome to visit him one still wintry day, and Lionel arranged for him to lunch in the mess. John was based

in Dieppe; he had been there since the beginning of summer, but this was the first time they had met since Lionel's home leave of more than a year earlier. He was nervous, Lionel thought; an outer skin of custom and experience had sloughed away, leaving a tenderness, perhaps a rawness. Lionel did most of the talking. After lunch he took him out across the field to the line of planes.

"This is mine," he said.

"What is it?"

"A Pup. The new Camels are supposed to be better, but I like this."

"How better?"

"On the firing mechanism, certainly. The Pup has a mechanical interrupter gear, which stops you firing when the blade's in front of the gun. On the Camel they have a hydraulic synchronizing gear, and you fire through the prop in time with the revs. I can see the point of that. No loss of fire power."

"You like flying, then."

Lionel nodded. "It's not too bad."

"The big bold aviator," John said. "There's no stopping you, Lye, is there?"

"Not at the moment."

"Doing the right things, and doing them well. It's a vocation, for some people."

"I don't know what the right things are."

"You don't have to, as long as you do them."

Lionel stroked the fuselage, warm from the November sun. They were due to make a sortie at half past two, the mechanics would soon be coming over for the final checks.

He said, "Is anything wrong, John?"

"Wrong?"

"I wondered. I had an idea things might be getting you down, one way or another."

They walked back toward the huts across the springy turf. It was not until they had almost reached them that John spoke.

He said, "Kitty sends her love."

Lionel asked, "Have you seen her lately?"

"I was home in August."

Lionel grinned. "You've been keeping it a long time."

"It doesn't stale, does it?"

He spoke strangely, Lionel thought. Reluctantly, but feeling that it might be necessary, that John might have something he needed to say to ease his mind, he asked, "There's nothing wrong—with you and Kitty?"

"There's nothing wrong," John said. He put his hand on Lionel's arm. "Lyc."

"Yes?"

"I haven't seen a lot of you lately, either."

"Well, there have been sufficient reasons for that."

"There were good times. They've gone for good, I suppose."

"I wouldn't say that. No war lasts forever."

"But we're different, aren't we? We can't go back to being the way we were."

"We're a bit older," Lionel laughed. "That doesn't stop us from enjoying ourselves. Maybe next winter we'll be back skiing in La Jatte."

"The Tulenkovs won't."

"I wonder what's happening to them. Perhaps things are not as bad as they're made out to be."

"You're an old-fashioned optimist, Lyc. Anyway, I thought you were in favor of socialism."

Lionel nodded. "In a general way, and barring murder. But what do people expect after three years of killing?"

"Survive it," John said. His voice was low and intense. "Come through it, Lyc—that's the important thing."

"I've already done it," Lionel said. He touched his wings. "They had their chance to kill me while I was on the ground, and they missed it."

"Good luck, then," John said. "Fly high."

The mission was a simple and straightforward one: they were to fly a patrol behind the German lines, shoot up anything, particularly in the way of observation balloons, that offered, and if possible provoke the enemy into attacking them. To Dingwell the shooting down of enemy planes was the only important thing, the requisite and entire purpose of flying. Any other duties which from time to time were required of his officers he treated with impatient

contempt as distractions from their one true mission. The war, in his view, would be won in the air, by attrition of the opposing air force. Every German plane shot down hastened the eventual triumph. His conviction was emotional rather than logical, as was demonstrated by the fact that he disliked, and where possible discouraged, attacks on enemy airfields. It was the shooting down that counted, the bird plucked from the wide sky. Lionel could understand this, and also the fact that, whenever possible, Dingwell led the squadron himself.

He was leading this day. There was very good visibility—a blue, bright sky with less than one-tenth cloud, away to the west, affording no cover. Over the lines, they came down to a few hundred feet. Leaning over the side, Lionel could see the lines of trenches and dugouts and faces looking up, drawn by the thunder of the planes. He was not sure exactly where they were; it was country that had been wooded, though the woods now were shell-splintered as well as bare, and there were a few low hills.

The figures looking up from the British lines gesticulated to them—whether in approval or anger it was difficult to be sure. In this element one tended to take approval, even adulation, as a right; it was the memory of comments he had heard when he was in the line himself that prevented him from doing so now. The reaction from the Germans was less equivocal, and a few stalwarts fired off rifles at them. Dingwell ignored these; disliking all ground targets, he could not be provoked into reprisals against the futile fire of individual soldiers.

The squadron cruised on to the southeast. They saw some balloons in the distance, but in every case they were wound down before the aircraft were near enough to attack. Once again, Dingwell made no strenuous efforts, although in any case the weather was probably against success. He turned his plane up, climbing into the cold, sparkling air, and the others followed him. Down below, the fields and woods dwindled and the world widened.

The theoretical ceiling of these planes was 17,500 feet, but it was not usual to fly at that height or anything approaching it. Dingwell leveled them off at just over twelve thousand and they flew serenely on. They were well inside enemy territory, and there was no sign of any other aircraft. Lionel thought of the men who

had waved their hands at the sky. The earth tied them; they walked like pygmies, with the mud sucking their heels. But here one was free of the earth, the strings all broken, a citizen of the heavenly province.

Checking back to Dingwell from the exalting sweep of blue, he saw his gloved hand outside the cockpit, gesturing, pointing. To the north there were dark specks. Although it was not yet possible to make an identification, they could hardly be anything but German. Dingwell banked and turned, and the rest followed. The chase was on.

Whether they had seen them initially or not, it was soon plain that the others saw them now. The two groups closed toward each other; at their combined speed of over two hundred miles an hour it would not be much more than a minute before they were within striking range. Lionel felt the skin prickle at the back of his neck; it was a sensation he had felt only in aerial combat. And at that instant his engine coughed and died, and the only sound was the air rushing past and the throb of the engines of the other planes. He put the Sopwith's nose down instinctively and heard the sound of the others diminish as they went on. Then he looked at his fuel gauge. It provided the simple and obvious explanation—a leak and now an empty tank.

Although he thought it unlikely they would see him, he waved a hand to the rest in a gesture signifying a washout and then banked away westward. The height was useful. There was a good chance, he felt, of reaching home ground; all that remained after that was to find a field suitable for landing. He had never had to make a forced landing before, but he was confident that he required only reasonable luck to be all right.

It seemed a long way down. Fields and farmhouses swelled little by little beneath him. He could hear the distant patter of machine guns, either from the ground or from the aerial melee behind. Otherwise all was peace—the air, the long-shadowed landscape, the misty red sun into whose light he was flying. Here was tranquility, in the cold crystal air.

Under a thousand feet, objects on the ground ballooned and he became aware of speed again, of things rushing past below. He peered forward, searching for level ground, and picked out a

promising stretch, an oblong field with its long side vertical to his line of flight. It seemed to be low-lying, flat country, with the evening mists already rising. There was a farmhouse nearby, shattered in a familiar way and showing no signs of life. He pushed the stick forward and then eased it back as the field came up to him. The front wheels hit the ground and then the tail thumped down. The plane bounced once or twice and rolled forward to a stop. Lionel pushed up his goggles and exhaled deeply, more with satisfaction than relief.

He looked around with interest. The field ran on to a broken stone wall, reinforced by hawthorns. There were other walls on either side and more fields beyond. Mist was crawling over the nearby fields; there was an easterly breeze of moderate strength. He could still see no movement other than the curling vapors. There was a noise of sporadic gunfire some distance away, possibly a couple of miles.

His chief objective must be to find on which side of the lines he had landed. Normally he would be expected, if he were in German territory, to set fire to the plane, but without petrol he could scarcely do that. The urgency related to his own situation; if he were in German territory, he might be able to keep under cover and head north for Holland.

Since the landing of the airplane had attracted no attention, he presumed that, whichever side he was on, he had had the good fortune to land clear of a fighting zone. The silence, the emptiness, was eerie, but gradually he became accustomed to it. He removed everything possible from the plane and then dropped over the side to the grass. He would need the compass and the chocolate; the rest could be hidden somewhere.

He found a hiding place inside the wall, pulling out loose stones and replacing them afterward. The plane looked strange, sitting in the middle of this unfamiliar field. The mist was creeping along the ground toward it. It was moving much faster than he had thought, and it had a yellowish tinge—it resembled an English fog more than river mist. And there should not be an evening mist with a breeze like this.

Not until he began to run did he realize that this field represented a pocket in the general advance of the vapor. On either side it had

gone farther, and it was curling round. The pocket could not survive for more than a minute or two.

He held his breath as he plunged forward into it. His eyes smarted and at once began to run with tears; he felt his nose running, too. He could see nothing around him but the yellowish white mist as he ran. His lungs began to ache for breath, but he held back. He resisted the tormenting temptation to breathe until the rough stonework of a wall came up before him and, unable to check, he collided with it and felt his lungs burst open and draw in involuntary breath. Then, choking and gasping and inhaling still more gas, he managed to scramble over the wall and continue his blind staggering progress.

There were pockets of clearer air and then more gas. He tried to breathe only where the gas was thinner, but in any case his body now acted almost without conscious control. It was his mind which drove him on, stumbling, falling and rising again. At last he stumbled and lay still. Looking up, through half-blind, streaming eyes, he saw the mist move, eddying above him, and thought that, through a break, he could glimpse the copper disk of the sun. He tried to cry out, in hope and praise, but the effort was too much.



## 5

IT WAS AUTUMN AGAIN when the crossed the frontier into Switzerland. Jimmy Prescott, who was looking after him, propped him up with one arm for a while so that he could see the gold and scarlet hills of the Jura. He looked at them with amazed and wondering eyes, but could not sit up for long. He lay down once more on his stretcher and thought of them while the train rattled on southward. Such beauty, he thought; a man could spend a lifetime watching it.

He was lifted up again after Lausanne, but the clouds were thick above the lake and there was little to see. Yet it was remarkable enough to look at that wide water again, and the villages clinging to the shore. None of this has changed, he thought, and he felt a kind of terror. So much else had changed, and so irremediably. For the first time since he had been told of his selection for the next batch of prisoners to be sent for recuperation to Switzerland, anticipation was touched with melancholy. He even wished, for a moment, to be back in the German prison hospital. All that had been a time out of life, the cocoon had not been comfortable, but it had kept the world from pressing closely on him. Now there would be demands again. He shook his head weakly. Of course there would. Demands; and one met them, as well as one could.

Luncheon was provided at Montreux, in the Hôtel Suisse, and then they were taken back to the station to be put aboard the other train. Crowded with the mutilated and sick, it made the usual slow, winding journey up into the hills and stopped at La Jatte. Lionel was taken off here—the only one to leave the train. The rest were going on to the camp at Château d'Oex; the French prisoners were kept on this side of the Hongrin valley. (The Germans had arranged this, to foster their story that French and British prisoners were mutually hostile.) As he was lifted out, Lionel saw the line of curious faces staring at him from the windows of the carriages. There was a little laughter and some cheers.

Prescott called out, "Have a good time, old chap. I'll pop along and see you."

A French motor ambulance was waiting to take him up to Chalet Fanshawe. One of the doctors accompanied him.

"A special case, I am told," he said. "You are to be under our care."

"My father-in-law lives here," Lionel said.

"So I am aware," said the doctor. "Do not talk if you find it distressing."

Gilbert was apologetic at having failed to meet him at the station. He said, "I tried to find out when the train was due, but they refused to give me any information—all this absurd military secrecy, even here in Switzerland." He followed the orderlies as they carried the stretcher with difficulty upstairs. "Your room is ready, at any rate. In here. To the right."

It was the room he had had during Victoria's confinement. The doors to the small balcony were open. Gilbert moved to shut these.

Lionel said, "No. Please. I like them open."

"Well, perhaps for a little while longer. But as you know, we lose the sun quite early, and it gets cold at this time of year. We had a heavy snowfall two weeks ago, but it thawed soon after." Gilbert watched the orderlies putting Lionel in bed. When they had done this, he burst out, "My poor Lye! You do look bad."

The doctor had come up, too. He said, "You have a pleasant room, my friend. I will come and make a proper examination

tomorrow morning." He turned to Gilbert. "He will have someone to attend him?"

"A woman from the village."

"Good. So cheerio, till tomorrow."

When they were alone, Lionel said, "Vicky?"

"She's coming. She was only told a short while ago, and it isn't easy to arrange passage at present. One has to get all kinds of special permission. She hopes to be here within a week anyway."

Lionel nodded. He was looking at Gilbert. It was nearly five years since he had last seen him. His body gave the appearance of having shrunk still further within the covering of flesh; face and neck were heavily wrinkled and one was conscious of the hard blue veins that ran across the bony wrists and hands. His hair was streaked with white, his beard was almost entirely of that color. He was wearing a green velvet smoking jacket and black serge trousers.

Lionel said, "I hope it's not—a lot of bother. I could go on to Château d'Oex, till Vicky comes."

"I'm delighted to have you, Lye," Gilbert said. "Quite delighted. I'm only sorry you're in such poor shape. How did—No, we'll leave the talking till you are rested. Try to get some sleep now. Yvette will be up here soon—I've sent word down that you've come."

It was apparent that in saying he was delighted Gilbert was speaking the exact truth. Possibly the four years of comparative isolation which he had been forced to spend had something to do with it; possibly also the fact of Lionel's dependence, as a sick man, on others met some obscure need in Gilbert's character. At any rate he showed no signs of being bored or irritated with his guest, but on the contrary spent long and seemingly contented hours by his bedside, talking or reading to him. Often, restless and stirring in the night, Lionel would hear the pad of feet and the flick of a light switch and see Gilbert come into his room, his gaze anxious and solicitous. He had difficulty, sometimes, in persuading him to return to the comfort of his bed.

Gilbert did not look for much response and was happy to do almost all the talking. This was as well, because speech had become a burden to Lionel, at times one impossible to bear.

He was always tired and slept a good deal. Then there would be times when, although the tiredness seemed equally great, sleep was beyond his reach. He would lie through long hours of the night, hearing the rain on the windows or the wind blowing through the firs behind the Chalet Russe, listening to strange cries: owls, the bark of foxes. And in the morning Gilbert would come in and have breakfast beside his bed, persuade him to have something, a buttered croissant, perhaps, and then talk to him. He talked a lot about his own early life, when he had traveled in most of the European countries and sometimes farther afield, to Mesopotamia and India. He would talk and Lionel would listen, drowsily, until his eyelids dropped.

It was nearly a fortnight before Victoria came; there had been a last-minute lurch in obtaining the necessary documents. The war, it was clear, was ending, and already the confusions of the incipient peace were being superimposed on the old confusions of war. But she came at last, and he saw her stand beside his bed and look at him, and knew the effort it was costing her not to show how deeply shocked she was by his appearance.

She said, "Lye, darling," and knelt down by the bed, bending over it to kiss him. She was not weeping, but he felt the warm tears well from his own eyes, to wet his cheeks and hers. He tried to say something and could not. Sensing the impediment, she said, "No, darling, darling, don't speak. There's no need to say anything. It's all going to be all right now."

There was a good time after that. Gilbert did not try to efface himself, but he did not seem to be in the way. Generally he left the two of them alone together in the evenings, but the rest of the time he still spent largely in the sickroom. There was a cheerfulness, which Lionel himself was deeply conscious of, informing their thoughts and speech. On good days the bed could be wheeled onto the veranda, and Gilbert and Victoria took turns sitting on the bed itself and on the one small chair which could also be accommodated. Before them lay the emerald slopes of La Jatte, the sharp and brilliant colors of the forest on Cubly, the blue wrinkled lake, the white tops of the Alps against the periwinkle sky.

The joy of these days was barely affected, for Lionel, by his

realization that he was dying. While in hospital in Germany he had always assumed that his real recovery would date from his release—that there would be some treatment for his ravaged lungs which the Germans did not have or would not bother to use on prisoners. At La Jatte, with Gilbert, he began to suspect the truth; with Victoria he was sure of it. He would have liked to know how long a sentence he had been given, and once or twice he was on the verge of broaching the matter when he was alone with Gilbert. But to do so would be to break this charm of days which rested on their belief in his illusions. Once he had come to see the truth, the charm was still more delicate and poignant. Each day was a separate miracle.

The nearest he came to saying anything was when they were talking of Wilf. Rain had blown up, darkening the sky, and a log fire crackled in the fireplace. Wisps of fume from it were carried across to Lionel's bed: they irritated him and he tried not to cough. He did not want to lose the sight of the blue smoke curling up from the wood's glowing red.

There had been a letter from Wilf in the morning's post, and Victoria was answering it. It was one that had been written before Victoria left England but which, as a result of the irregular courses of the mail in those days, had only just reached them. Lionel had smiled at and been touched by the pedantic Workers' Educational English, the stilted phrases wishing him well in Wilf's crabbed sloping hand. Now Victoria read out what she had written in reply and asked if there was anything he wanted to add. Lionel thought about this. Tiredness lay heavily on him.

"Just say—" he paused to restrain a cough—"say, 'I rely on you, old chap.' Something like that."

She bent her head to write, and he went on, speaking more loudly than he usually did now—he saw Victoria's head come up again—"I wish he could have come out here."

"There's nothing he would have liked better," Victoria said. "But it was difficult enough for me." As though conscious of a lapse, she added, "The war will be over next year. Perhaps he'll be able to come then."

"Perhaps." She went on writing. "Vicky."

She blotted the page. "What is it, Lye?"

"You can rely on Wilf, too—you know that, don't you? He's someone you can trust."

"Well, yes, I know that."

"If ever there were need, you could put things in Wilf's hands and not have to worry."

She looked at him, smiling, "They're better in your hands, all the same."

Their eyes stared at each other; behind them truth strained on a gossamer leash, to be broken by a word, a look. If he made the gesture, what would it mean—what would the rest of their time together be? Content with what he had, he would not risk it. He said only, "Well, I can't take them in my hands until I'm well again."

After that they sat quietly, the silence unbroken until they heard Gilbert's footsteps on the stairs. Entering the room, he said, "No light? Yes, it's pleasanter, I think, in the firelight."

"You can switch it on," Lionel said.

"Leave it," Victoria said. Her face was hidden in the shadows and her voice was unsteady. Lionel wondered if she had been crying. "It's better like this."

Gilbert went to the fire and put on another log. Sparks were dashed up as the heart of the fire broke.

"There's news," Gilbert said, straightening up.

"What news?" Victoria asked.

"In the village. It seems it's all over. There is to be an armistice tomorrow morning. At eleven o'clock, they say."

There was a moment's silence. "Over?" Victoria said.

"I got hold of a bottle of champagne," Gilbert said, "from old Perret. We'll drink it tomorrow."

"To celebrate," Victoria said.

Her voice was dull. In another silence the charm might break, and once it broke there would be no time to mend it. Lionel said, in a strong voice, "That's fine. To celebrate peace, and all our good fortune."

## TWO





# 1

**D**URING THAT LEAVE of Lionel's—the last one for which they were both in Manchester together—John had wanted to tell him about the Whitedale business. But there was a gulf between them, symbolized by Lionel's uniform, by the three pips on his shoulder and the D.S.O. ribbon. He had tried to bridge it by getting Lionel to talk about his life in France, but his attempts failed. Lionel's withdrawal was too marked; since his last home leave he had grown a shell of polite indifference and sat behind it looking, John thought, at a world artificial and unreal compared with the one he had left behind.

The nearest he came to talking about it was on the Sunday morning when they turned in, after a walk, at a pub in Withington. It was one they had visited together before the war but which neither had been in since, and there was a feeling of intimacy and shared recollections that was propitious to confidence. They sat on a black leather upholstered bench, punched at intervals with black metal buttons, facing, on the wall, a framed print of Manchester at the time of the Mafeking celebrations. In 1913 it had been an outdated relic; now it had an ironic quaintness.

"Not much change here," John said.

"None at all."

They drank and put their tankards down. John said, "You haven't got a preference for wine yet, then?"

Lionel shook his head, smiling slightly. He said, "Not yet. Well, John, what's new in cotton?"

It was an opening; but at the same time it was an evasion, another refusal. And it was difficult to find a way of explaining. He could not refer back to their old ideas, to their plans for someday working together again. Too much had happened, in his own life as well as Lionel's. Those characters who stood so large in his affairs were, to Lionel, faint shadows from a distant past, from the artificial and unreal.

The board of directors of Sickert's had five working members at that time. Sir Matthew Sickert, the chairman, sixty-eight years old, was a taciturn, irascible man, tall and almost bald, with a passion for detail and the observance of forms. He wore heavy pebble spectacles, which he was constantly removing to wipe his eyes. He was young for his age and could have boasted that he had never missed a day's work because of illness. The boast was not actually made, but the achievement was well known.

James, the old man's nephew, was the only other Sickert on the board. Four years older than John, he was conscientious but ineffectual, both in his work and in his relations with his fellow directors. Illness, which so conspicuously spared his uncle, pressed heavily on James; he was away a good deal, and when he was in he frequently had an air of conscious heroism. He too was tall and thin and wore spectacles, but the two men were not alike physically. There was nothing of Sir Matthew's toughness in James.

The other two members, apart from John, were also descendants of the Joshua Sickert who had founded the firm, but through the female line. The father, Andrew Wainwright, a few years younger than Sir Matthew, was a stout, red-faced man, who mixed with the mill hands when the chance offered, and was well liked by them. In business he carried geniality to the point of weakness. His son, Tom, in the middle thirties like James Sickert, had the same high color, and it seemed probable that he would in due course be even fatter. He had his father's surface bonhomie, but it concealed a colder, sharper, more ambitious mind.

Although James would have been the logical heir when either

death or the disability of old age should force Sir Matthew to relinquish the chairmanship, in recent years there had been a growing likelihood that Tom Wainwright would succeed. This had been on the cards even before the war; an appreciation of it had lain behind John's suggestion, at the time of his own promotion to the board, that Lionel might come back to Sickert's. It was Lionel's due, he thought, to take over Sickert's in the end, and in this respect Tom Wainwright was the only real stumbling block. If Lionel had come in then, even though the war would still have removed him from the active administration, it would have been impossible for Wainwright to consolidate himself, as he now looked like doing. With the war over, Lionel could have come back and taken, as of right, a commanding position. Once, however, that position was in Wainwright's hands, there would be little hope of prying him out of it. If not particularly intelligent, he was tenacious and shrewd.

The need to contain Wainwright had been part of John's reasons for remaining in civil life. He was volunteering for the Army now because the pressure had become too great. James Sickert had also talked about volunteering, but he had been doing so since the outbreak of war and, in any case, was almost certainly physically unfit. Wainwright had said nothing. Whatever his final decision, John saw, he would wait until he was out of the way, and with him out of the way there would be good reasons for Wainwright remaining at home. There was, for instance, the question of the handling of government contracts.

This was a side of the business which had been passed on to John, as the junior director, at a time when it had been of very minor importance. The war had changed all that, but John, by reason of having already established the necessary contacts with the right people in London, had kept charge of it. By taking over, Wainwright would both strengthen his grip on the number two position and provide himself with a good argument against taking up military duties. It would be obvious that there was no one who could effectively take over from him if he went. After that, there would be no looking back.

And yet it was here that Wainwright was vulnerable; here that, at this late hour, John had found the weapon which might

be used against him. The question was whether he dared use it. It was this which he would have liked to discuss with Lionel, and he felt some resentment at the difficulties which Lionel's attitude of withdrawal had put in the way. It was he, in the long run, who would benefit from the scotching of Wainwright. After the war, Lionel must see that it would be to his advantage to bring the Leverton into Sickert's, with the prospect for himself of taking over the entire organization. But the advantage would not exist if effective power by then were in Wainwright's hands.

The request for news of the industry, although casual, could perhaps be made to provide an opening. But it was necessary to find the right way in, and while he was looking for it Lionel said, "I saw the old boy the other morning."

The old boy was Sir Matthew. John said, "Did you speak to him?"

"No." Lionel paused. "It was a bit silly, perhaps. I didn't go across to him because of Tony."

Tony, Sir Matthew's only son, had been killed at the very beginning of the war, at Mons.

"He's had time to get over that," John said. "He never did show much."

"It's hard to explain," Lionel said. "Sometimes you feel guilty about being a survivor."

John was hurt by the obvious underlying criticism.

"If you're to feel guilty," he said, "what about the rest of us?"

Lionel shook his head. He said, transparently sincere, "I didn't mean that. It's a personal thing." He paused for a moment. "I found out a short while ago that I'm the only one left of the original officers in my battalion. You can get an odd feeling that you've survived at someone else's expense. It isn't logical, but it's there. Just so many bullets, and so many targets."

It was a coming into the open, John saw; without understanding what it was that Lionel was trying to tell him, he knew it for communication—the communication which had been lost and which he had tried, from his side, to restore. But he saw, too, that instead of helping it put up a new and insuperable obstacle. He could not now talk about Wainwright to the Lionel who had avoided the old man because his son had been killed and he was

still alive. It was a thought, an illumination, which made the whole maneuver seem grubby and futile.

"It's just me, probably," Lionel said. "I had a shaking up. I've been out of sorts."

"No," John said, "not you."

Lionel looked at him curiously. He shrugged. "It's not easy to explain these things."

"I understand," John said. "I understand."

They stood a long way apart, John realized, further than he had guessed. He wondered which of them had moved most from their old tenancy of common ground, or if perhaps they had never been together, but only had the illusion of it. What must it be like, he wondered, to be Lionel—to do things simply and cleanly, neither fearing nor gloating? He felt a spasm of nausea for himself and then thought of Wainwright, of the sharp eyes deeply set above the pouchy red cheeks, and the nausea changed to the cold honesty of hatred. Lionel could not do it, nor even be told of it, but it could be done for him. And that was reason enough for doing it.

The headquarters of Joshua Sickert Sons and Company, Ltd., was also its chief distributing center. Everything was in a proper order: the heavier cloths at the bottom, the materials increasing in lightness and variety as one climbed the ornate iron-railed stairs. In the basement, flannels, blankets, rugs, oilcloths, gray calicoes, twills and sheeting. On the first floor, linens and shirts. On the second, bleached calicoes, shirtings, fustians, velveteens, jeans, lambskins. On the third, quilts, counterpanes, toilet covers, cotton blankets, fancy dress goods. And on the fourth, flannelettes, Oxfords, prints, zephyrs, sateens, muslins and lace curtains.

On the ground floor were the offices of the company, opening off on either side from the corner entrance. The board room was in the center of things, as Sir Matthew, twenty-seven years earlier, had planned it. Its heavy doors faced the foot of the staircase and its constant hum of activity. But the doors were doubled, designed to deaden the sounds from the rest of the building. Less could be done in the case of sounds from outside; the noise of traffic was little diminished by passing through the high, narrow windows.

It was on the Tuesday afternoon following John's walk with Lionel that the board met. Sir Matthew's secretary, a little twisted man not much younger than Sir Matthew himself, read the minutes of the previous meeting, and they came to the main item on the agenda.

Sir Matthew said, "This business of the Whitedale. We want a report from you, Burchall. What's the position now?"

John cleared his throat before speaking. It was like going back to the beginning again, to the first time he had sat in this room, when he had known what it was like, at twenty-eight, to be a frightened child. Then it had only been necessary to overlay panic with silence, to nod, at times to force a smile. Now more was demanded of him.

He said, in a harsh voice, "I'd better run over events, for the record."

"Yes." Sir Matthew nodded. "Keep it short."

Looking at his sheet of notes, John rapped out words. "We have had a series of bulk government orders for thirty-two twills, which have been handled at the Whitedale mill. The first of these orders was laid in January 1915, and we made delivery in April 1915. Total deliveries to date have been nine hundred thousand yards. The biggest individual order was the last, for two hundred thousand yards, supplied last July. That's where we've had the trouble. The cloth's faulty. We're not denying this. We've all seen samples of the rejected cloth."

Wainwright said disgustedly, "And whose fault is it? You know the kind of cotton they send us these days. We've got to take what we can get."

"It was passed," John said, "at the Whitedale. That's the point."

Wainwright, who was responsible for general production, was particularly concerned in the case of the Whitedale. As a younger man he had served his apprenticeship there, and managing it had been his first responsible job for the company. The present manager, Toogood, was one of his men. When the trouble over the defective twill had first cropped up, Wainwright had leaped in to defend the mill and Toogood. He had also, without consulting the board first, written an injudicious letter to the Board of Trade official

who had leveled the complaint. Altogether, he had acted rashly. John had been given the job of smoothing things out.

John waited now to see if Wainwright would make any further reply, but he kept silent. He was far from being a fool. He had realized that the only thing to do was to sit things out as quietly as possible. It was reasonable to assume that if he did so they would blow over.

"We're not arguing this," Sir Matthew said. "We accept responsibility. Sickert's has always accepted responsibility for its goods, whether bought by the Government or by anyone else. We'll replace. You've told them that?"

John nodded. "Yes."

"Then it's all clear?"

"No," John said, "it isn't."

This was what he had keyed himself up for, sharpening his resolution on a whetstone of fear and cold sweat deliberately invoked. If it went wrong, he was finished—finished in Sickert's and finished in cotton. And although he thought he had the possibilities covered, it could go wrong. It had been easy enough to feed Chambers, and if Sir Matthew took John's advice Chambers would play up; it was the sort of thing he could do splendidly. But if Sir Matthew allowed outrage to master common sense and went to London storming at the insult, Chambers would probably cave in. And even if Chambers did not cave in to the extent of stamping him as a traitor to the firm's interests, John would certainly be marked as a weak and ineffectual negotiator.

"What's up?" Sir Matthew asked. "Out with it."

"For one thing, there's a penalty clause. We're well past the delivery date now."

"But we're replacing."

Voices were far away, his own the farthest. He spoke as flatly as possible, consciously forming each individual syllable. He said, "We're liable under the clause. It can't be denied."

"By God! How much?"

"Cost plus twenty-five."

"In addition to replacement?"

"In addition."

Wainwright said, shocked, "But they're not invoking that!"

"There's the question of the previous seven hundred thousand yards," John said. "They feel they may have been substandard as well. It wouldn't be easy to check at this stage."

"They passed them!" Wainwright said. "They passed them all."

"They passed the last lot too. They only caught it on a double check. They are prepared to admit their own system may have been faulty, but that doesn't make them any more happily disposed toward us."

With open anger, Wainwright said, "How the hell have you been handling this, Burchall?" He turned to Sir Matthew. "I'd like to have it passed over to me. I'll go down there and fix things."

When he wanted to, Sir Matthew could conceal his thoughts and emotions perfectly. He was doing so now. John searched for an indication, some flicker of feeling, but found nothing. At any rate, he was committed. There was no way back.

He said, "I haven't finished yet."

He spoke more loudly than he had intended; but it had the effect of silencing Wainwright, forcing him to turn back to look at John.

"There is the possibility," he said, "of a criminal prosecution."

James Sickert made a whistling sound. Wainwright sat silent, staring.

Sir Matthew said, in a tone of quiet amazement, "Criminal prosecution!"

"There have been a lot of scandals about government contracts," John said. "You've seen the agitation in *John Bull* and in Parliament. There's a feeling in the ministry about taking a strong line."

Andrew Wainwright said, "They'd never get a conviction."

John shook his head. "No. I don't think, when it came to the point, they would bring a case even. As much as anything else, the idea would be to give warning—to serve general notice of a tightening up."

"To use Sickert's," Sir Matthew said, "as a means of scaring the rest of the industry."

His voice was still calm, but that meant nothing. The storm



generally developed below the surface and then ripped loose with sudden violence.

Trying to match the calm himself, John said, "That would have been it."

The thin, coldly angry face came around. "Would have been?"

"I think I've brought them around. I don't think they will even enforce the penalty." He leaned forward slightly, locking his eyes on Sir Matthew's face, speaking to him and to him only. "I've told Chambers you will personally go down to London to provide assurances that nothing like this can possibly happen again. They're satisfied with that."

"I'm to go cap in hand to London, apologize nicely, and promise we will be good boys for the future. Is that it, Burchall?"

There was a moment's panic urge to qualify, to hedge, to blur the outlines with words. But he said slowly, "Yes, sir. It amounts to that."

"A criminal prosecution," Sir Matthew said, "against Sickert's." He took off his spectacles and rubbed his eyes with a large silk handkerchief. "Make an appointment for me, Burchall. I'll do it."

Awakening to what had happened, Wainwright said desperately, "I can't see it's necessary for you to go and see them in person. A letter would be enough, surely. If you just write and say—"

The bony hand, blotched with yellow and brown, stopped him. Sir Matthew said, "If there's one chance in a thousand of Sickert's being prosecuted, and one in a thousand of stopping it by having me go down there and eat humble pie, I'm going. I don't think your advice is needed on this subject, Tom. I'll do what I think best."

"For God's sake!" Wainwright burst out. "What are things coming to? A bloody little clerk like Chambers . . ."

There was a silence. When Sir Matthew spoke again, his voice was unsteady. He said, "There are times when we have to make sacrifices, Tom. I'm too old to go and fight. All I've got to offer is pride. It's different for you younger men. Burchall is going in a few weeks. You'll want to be going, too, won't you, Tom? We've been holding on to you for too long."

While he spoke his voice had been rising in volume; he was practically shouting when he finished. He paused and went on in

a quieter tone. "Make your arrangements, Tom." He turned to his secretary. "Next business, Clarkson."

There had been other times when he had felt something like this—in the few days of that holiday in Switzerland after Katharine had accepted him, when Sir Matthew had called him in to tell him of his promotion—but he could not remember that the delight had been so keen. His blood sang with it; he saw things in brighter colors and more sharply, intuitively. At home, when he went up as usual to the nursery, he was aware of a new joy in his sons, an almost stifling love. In his embracing perception he knew their innocence as though from within—somehow sharing as well as wondering at, as well as worshiping it. He came downstairs again, flushed with pleasure, and found Katharine in the drawing room.

She poured him his customary brandy and soda, but did not sit down beside him on the ottoman until he patted the cushions to invite her. She looked tired, strained. He supposed it was with the problems of domestic life during a war—the second housemaid had left nearly a fortnight before and it had not yet been possible to replace her—and reflected with admiration on how rarely she showed signs of this.

"You should take a drink in the evening, too, Kitty," he said. "It would soothe your nerves."

"No," she said. "My nerves are all right."

He put his glass down on a small table and began to tell her something of the details of that afternoon's board meeting. From the outset of their married life he had formed the habit of discussing facets of his business life with her; she commented intelligently on them and seemed to be interested. It had been a welcome additional bond, the more so in making up for those parts of his life about which she knew nothing. He was always conscious of editing these accounts; tonight he told her very fully of what had taken place in the afternoon, but said nothing of the deception on which his actions had been based.

He said, "It was through being so late with Chambers yesterday that I had to spend the night down there. I went to the meeting straight from the train. It was probably a good thing, as it turned

out. Everything came with so much more impact; there was no time for Wainwright to try wriggling."

This was true, although staying in London had had little to do with Chambers. There would have been time to catch the late train back.

Katharine said, "It seems to have worked out very well."

Her voice was a little flat; perhaps he was catching nuances that at another time, his awareness less heightened, he might have missed. The failure in response disappointed him.

He said emphatically, "It's worked out well, all right. The old boy won't forget in a hurry that it was Wainwright who was responsible for him having to go down to London and beg off."

"Yes." She made an effort. "Does it matter much—about Wainwright?"

With some surprise, he said, "It keeps the road open for Lionel. That's what I've always been concerned about. You know that."

"Lionel," she said, as though not understanding. "Have you told him anything about this?"

John said uncomfortably, "Not yet. He has enough business to talk during his leaves, with Maine, without being bothered with more from me."

"He's going back tomorrow morning," she said.

"Yes, I know. And I report a fortnight after that. Why don't you get Vicky to close their house up for the duration and come and stay here with you? It would make things easier for both of you."

"The war," Katharine said, "the war!" She pressed her fists against her mouth, as though in self-punishment. "What sense is there in it? Nothing but death and destruction and endless misery." She closed her eyes. "It isn't going to stop. Until now I've thought it would stop before everything was destroyed and blown up, but now I can see it won't. Oh, why are we all so blind, so stupid?"

"We've got to put up with it," he said.

"Put up with it? Put up with the things we love being smashed—the people we love?"

"There's nothing else we can do."

She turned away from him. He saw that she was sobbing and put his hand against her back to soothe her.

He said, "You don't have to worry too much about me, anyway. I'm not going into a very warlike part. No glory, but no death."

His hand went up to her shoulder, gripping it lovingly. She would turn round to him, and they would kiss, celebrating their own little corner of safety in the world's holocaust. It was the right, the inevitable thing. They would kiss, and he would go upstairs with her to change. He wanted her very much, despite London yesterday—perhaps because of it.

But she did not turn, her body made no answer, and he understood it was not for him, for his engulfment in the war, that she was weeping. Lionel, then.

He said gently, "You don't have to worry about Lye, Kitty. He'll be all right. They can't touch Lye."

She turned round. The tears had swollen her cheeks, staining the powder which, in the last few months, she had taken to using. She said, "Why does he have to go back? Hasn't he done enough?"

"He'll be all right," John said. "Do you know what he told me on Sunday? That he's the only one left out of his battalion. There's always someone like that, someone the bullets just don't hit. Lye's that kind."

She looked at him, her face trembling. She was trying not to show her emotion, but he recognized it as horror.

"Don't," she said. "Don't be so complacent. It doesn't help to talk like that, and it isn't true. It isn't true!"

He was hurt by this, but, still believing that it was no more than ordinary anxiety for a friend, for Victoria's husband, for the Lionel of whom he himself was so deeply fond, he mastered his feeling. He said, "Don't take it too hard, Kitty." He put his hand on her knee. "I know how things are for you, how hard everything is. That's why I think it would be a good idea to have Vicky living here when I go. You and she would be a comfort to each other."

"Ah, no." The tears welled in her eyes and flowed again. She

said, with a cry of desperate agony: "Not Vicky. Anyone but her."

It was then he understood. The illumination came hesitantly, half withdrew, and at last rushed through his mind in flood. At another time he would have dismissed it as incredible, a treachery against the seven years of their marriage that could only have sprung from his own tortuous infidelity. But the demonic intuitiveness still held and informed him, and although the knowledge dazed and bewildered he knew that it was true.

He asked, "Does Vicky know . . . how you feel about Lye? Does Lye know?"

His words shocked and, in a sense, steadied her. She said quickly, "What do you mean? You're not saying . . ."

Everything she said now, every last look or gesture, was confirmation. He saw her as he had seen Wainwright, the nerves exposed, the motives plainly known even when not completely fathomed.

"I never guessed," he said. "It's funny, that. And yet it must have been going on for some time. It's not just happened overnight."

"Nothing has happened. Nothing's been going on."

She had taken his words, he saw, as meaning more than he had intended, as referring to the act as well as the thought. It was against that accusation she defended herself, and with a sincerity that he could not doubt. But the very sincerity confirmed everything else. His look showed this, and, turning from it, she made admission.

"How long?" he asked her. "I want to know, Kitty. How long has it been Lye you wanted? I'm not accusing you of anything else. I just want to know when it started."

"Never," she said. She shook her head, the movement violent and prolonged. "Never, never!"

Her words were steppingstones, across which he could leap to a sure ground of comprehension.

"Always, then," he said. "Right from the beginning? Vicky got him, and so you took me."

She made no reply and did not look at him. She was not sobbing any longer; her shoulders rose and fell only a little more

markedly than usual. John watched her for a minute or two and then, saying nothing further, walked away toward his study.

He thought about things a lot between that moment and his last meeting with Lionel, on the airfield in France. Once he had assimilated it, it was not too bad. There was the deep injury, the humiliation, of knowing that Katharine's love for him had been a pretense—that she had been indifferent to his giving, had smiled to herself, perhaps, at his heart's offering; but he found compensations. His own occasional and brief physical infidelities were, he saw, nothing in comparison with that deeper, uglier infidelity of which he had been the victim. He would reproach himself for them no longer. And as for love itself, there were the children, his sons. His devotion to them consciously increased, and, paradoxically, he was the more grateful to Katharine for having given them to him, when she could not give herself. When, following his enlistment, he went away for training, he wrote brief friendly letters to Katharine, but with considerably longer enclosures for her to read out to the children. In one letter, not knowing quite why, he asked her to keep these. He himself kept the bright scrawled pictures which they drew for him and she sent on. He never showed these to anyone, and would look at them only when he was alone.

When he saw Lionel his emotions at first were more than half accusing and were spurred by Lionel's obvious delight at having found a way out of trench warfare. He would go back all right, still decked, though not knowing it, with the love of another man's wife. And this time John would be conscious of the humiliation, pricked by it every time the two families visited each other, every time he caught her eyes watching him. He tried to hate Lionel for this and for a time did feel resentment, but the resentment could not survive their being together again.

Before he left, they talked of the war and he said, surprised by the passion of his own feeling, "Survive it. Come through it, Lye—that's the important thing."

Lionel looked younger, more carefree than John had seen him since the war started. Observing this change, John for the first

time had an insight into what the rest of it must have been like, and was touched with dread.

Lionel smiled, putting a hand up to his chest in a gesture of bravado. "I've already done it. They had their chance to kill me while I was on the ground, and they missed it."

"Good luck, then," John said. He put his hand out and grasped Lionel's. "Fly high."

His trip had involved a circuitous train journey. Patience was still required of him on the return; he got to the station to find that there had been a cancellation and he would have to wait for two hours there. He was standing on the deserted platform, contemplating the gleaming, empty arrows of the lines, when he heard the approaching roar of low-flying aircraft. Looking up, he saw them cross the brightness of the sun and move on, climbing, with a look of invincibility, into the embracing blue.

## 2

KATHARINE had a letter from Victoria shortly after she went out to La Jatte to be with Lionel. She wrote in her customary quick scrawl, but the letter had a feeling of bluntness and measured deliberation, and a little of wonder.

It is as well that I didn't hope too much. I wouldn't have thought I could ever feel grateful to the Germans, but I'm grateful for their warning: it's helped me to hide things from Lye which I don't think I could have done without having time for preparation. I saw the French doctor who has been attending him before I went up to the chalet—the French have taken over all the hotels and the Édouard is a sort of combined hospital and barracks—and he told me there was no chance at all of Lye recovering, that his lungs had been so badly damaged that it was surprising he had survived so long. He may last a few more months, certainly not a year.

So I was prepared for the worst when I saw him. I don't know what I really expected, but I was surprised to find him looking so—not well, perhaps, but so much alive. And finding that, I nearly broke down, for all my preparation. He's very thin and so much without color that his skin seems almost transparent, but he is as happy and serene as he ever was. No, more so. There's a gaiety which it's hard to describe in a letter, but you feel it as soon as you come into his room. It rubs off on you; there are



times when I feel miserable and unhappy, but they are when I am not with Lye. With him one can't be unhappy for long. Papa has noticed this, too, and, to his own astonishment, I think, has become an excellent sickroom attendant. When he's with Lye he loses all his old crotchiness and aloofness, though it's still there at other times. The three of us spend a lot of time just sitting together, sometimes without saying a word, and we are all happy.

I suppose I should consider the future, but I don't want to. Day to day is good enough. What will come after has no meaning for me, so I don't think of it.

We hope you are all well, especially the children. Papa and Lye send their love, and I do too.

Katharine left the letter on the desk in John's study for him to see. He had been transferred earlier in the year to a base depot in Yorkshire and was able to get home most week ends. They had not discussed Lionel since Katharine's moment of revelation; what news there had been of him was imparted and received briefly and without comment. But now John took the letter with him to where Katharine was sitting in the drawing room, busy with embroidery. She sat in an armchair near the window. The room took the afternoon sun, which today was shining brightly and more warmly than one would expect at this time of year.

"So it's true," he said.

She looked at the letter in his hand.

"Yes, it's true." Her voice was dry, noncommittal.

John said, "He can't be dying. I won't believe it. Why doesn't she get a really good man out from London?"

"There are just as good doctors in Switzerland," Katharine said. Her fingers moved swiftly; the needle flashed in the sun. "Better, perhaps."

"She could do something!"

Katharine shook her head. "No."

His shocked unhappiness was made worse by the sight of her calmness, her preoccupation with the day's ordinary duties. She bent over her silks, showing nothing.

"You take it well," he said.

"Yes."

He looked at the date on the letter. "When did this come?"  
 "Three days ago."

He understood. "So you've had time to get over it? You've done your weeping already. Well? Haven't you?"

She looked up. Her eyes remained dry, but her face and lips were blanched.

"Yes," she said. "I've had time."

"What was it like?" he said. "Tell me. I'd like to know about it. Did you cry all night? During the day? Did you hide your feelings in front of the children, or did they ask you what it was that was making you sad?"

She made no answer. He took the embroidery from her, firmly but not roughly, and threw it onto another chair.

"Tell me everything," he said. "Did you beat your head against the pillow, force your nails into your own skin?" Reaching down, he put his hands on either side of her face. "Did you wish it could be someone else rather than Lye—anyone else?"

"Don't," she said.

Either weeping or resentment would have kindled his anger, but the simplicity and sadness of her response tuned with his own grief. She looked at him, unafraid, asking nothing, and it was he that turned away. He went to the sideboard and got himself a drink. When he looked back, she was staring out the window at the bare, bright garden.

"If you would like to go out there," he said, "I think I could fix things. It only means a word in the right ear. The war's just about over. It shouldn't be too hard."

She shook her head slightly. "No, thank you."

"It would be quite reasonable for you to go out," he said. "Quite apart from Lye being your brother-in-law and Vicky wanting help, there's your father. It's nearly five years since you saw him."

She shook her head again. "I'll stay here," she said. "I don't want to see him die."

Lionel died in the early weeks of 1919, but Victoria did not return to England for another couple of months. When she did come back, it was with no advance notice, and therefore the Burchalls (John had been demobilized and was settled again in the

routine of business) could not meet her. She went home alone and did not telephone to Katharine until the following day. Katharine went to visit her in the afternoon and left word with John that he should join her after business hours.

Victoria had released all the servants except the cook before going abroad, and it was the cook who let John in. The house, he noticed, was looking shabby. Victoria had never bothered much about that kind of thing, and Lionel, of course, had not been able to. It had been something that would be seen to after the war. In the hall, he ran his fingers against the paint and felt it flake off. The war was over now, and it was still hard to believe that there was no Lionel.

To his surprise and disappointment there was someone else with Victoria and Katharine: Wilf Maine. He lay back in a chair, in a position of ease, his black boots stuck out in front of him. These boots, Victoria had once told Katharine, were one of his few luxuries: he had them made by hand. The aim was presumably comfort. They were the reverse of elegant.

John said to Victoria, "I'm desperately sorry, Vicky. I don't want to lay it on too heavily—you'll have had enough to go through. But you know how I feel."

Victoria smiled. Her face displayed vagueness rather than any precise emotion.

"I know, John," she said. "Sit down, won't you? Oh, perhaps you would pull the bell first, for Marie to bring some fresh tea."

John did as she had asked him. He studied Victoria with some bewilderment. Here, as previously with Katharine, the reaction differed from the one he had expected; but Katharine's calm, which had proved to be the calm of grief already borne and assimilated, had had a dignity and significance. Here there was neither. Victoria had been chatting to Katharine about the Montreux colony, and she continued with this.

"One of the strangest things," she said, "is that Isabel Osmond has been married again."

"Then she didn't go back to America," Katharine asked, "in 1914?"

"She thought it was her duty to stay in Europe; in Switzerland, anyway."

Katharine said, "She must be over sixty, surely."

"Well, she looks a good deal more. A scraggy beanpole, poor thing. She has married an Italian, a funny roundish fellow who's always talking and laughing. They make an odd couple."

"Does he liven her up?"

"Who could? Her kind of dullness goes too deep. She still has the same quiet vulgarity. She could never have been any different."

John found the conversation unsettling; he suspected, from her look, from an occasional note of strain in her voice, that Katharine did so too. He said, "How's your father, Vicky? Has he changed much?"

"He's older, of course," she said. "He doesn't bother to paint at all now. He doesn't do anything very much. He's waiting for things to get back to normal, poor dear. I think he half expected to hear the bells tinkling on the big sleigh as the Tulenkovs drove up to Chalet Russe again. There was good snow at La Jatte this year, but no one to enjoy it except the wounded French officers. And most of them are too badly wounded to be able to ski, or even luge."

"Is there news of the Tulenkovs?"

"Rumors. Rumors that they've been killed, massacred, rumors that Peppi and Alex are still fighting with the White Russians. No one knows for sure." She gave a small snort of derision. "The Swiss thrive on distant calamities, and most of the English colony are as bad."

"And Chalet Russe?"

"It was empty until the French took it over for their wounded. It will be empty again soon, I suppose. They are being moved back to France. I gather the house was in a bad enough state before it was taken over, and it's far worse now. They parked the motor ambulances on the croquet lawn."

"A croquet lawn," John asked, "in Chalet Russe? Was there one? I never knew that."

"A very fine one."

"But they never used it?"

"That one year when they came in the late summer, they used it then."

"It seems a long time ago."

Marie had brought fresh tea. Victoria poured a cup for John.

"It was a long time ago," she said. "Hundreds of years. Will you have a biscuit, John? They're not very nice, I'm afraid."

"Well," he said, "I suppose we have to look to the present now. Or to the future."

"Yes," Victoria agreed. "That's what we have to do."

"I don't know how things stand," John said, "but if there's anything we can do . . . You might not be able to lay your hands on money readily."

"Lyc saw to all that. Thank you, though."

John nodded. "Then the rest can wait. I do want to have a talk with you about the Leverton sometime. About its future."

She smiled. "Fix it up with Wilf. You could go along and see John sometime, Wilf, couldn't you?"

"Any time," Wilf said, "within reason. We're still at full pressure."

John managed, despite his dislike of the suggestion, to show a degree of affability toward Wilf.

"I don't want to rush anything," he said. "But it would be as well not to let too much grass grow."

"Well, then," Victoria said. "Fix it up together."

She sat back in her chair. It was a small movement of physical withdrawal, but he felt that it indicated something more.

He said sharply, "We have to fit you in too, don't we? Or do you mean that you will be free any time it suits us?"

He had been more brusque than he had intended. Settling still farther back, Victoria said, with a laugh, "No, I didn't mean that. You can leave me out of it. Wilf knows all about the Leverton. I don't know anything."

He controlled his resentment. "Wilf's the one who knows all about the Leverton," he said. "We're not disputing that. But you're the person who owns it. Wilf is the manager. You're not telling me Lyc didn't leave everything to you?"

She gave a little wry smile. "Yes, he left everything to me. But he told me to lean on Wilf, and providing he lets me I shall do it."

Wilf said, "There will be no need for you to worry, Vicky. Everything's going all right."

His cockiness became more offensive, John thought, as time went by. He was confident he was not being unjust to the man in this

reaction. In the industry as a whole, he was neither liked nor much respected. He had no friends that John knew of. Except for Lionel he had kept his face resolutely set against what he would call the boss class, mixing with them only when he had to and then with a distinctly bad grace. He must have lost any friends he had once had among the workers, too, by reason of his position. He was a lonely man, but John felt no sympathy with him on that account. The loneliness was of his own making.

Ignoring him, John said, in a reasonable voice, "What I want to talk about concerns the ownership, Vicky. So it has to concern you."

"Does it? Will you have some more tea? Wilf, then? Kitty?"

"So," he persisted, "if you care to fix a time . . ."

Victoria nodded. "I will, John."

"Can we fix it now?"

"Not yet." She made a gesture of vagueness. "You must give me time to settle into things."

"Yes, of course," John said. "I quite see that."

Victoria turned to Katharine. "Little Claudette, the daughter of Monsieur Garve, at the school—do you remember? The parents had such great ideas for her. She was to have a tremendous career."

"Yes," Katharine said, "I remember her."

"Apparently she went to study at Lausanne University a year last autumn. And then, last spring, she found herself *enceinte*. One of the Kathou boys—Emile. They were married in the summer, and she lives in the Kathou house and helps Madame Kathou in the *laiterie*. She has a boy."

Katharine said, "Poor Monsieur Garve. He was very ambitious for her."

"She seems quite happy. Probably it's a mistake to be too ambitious for girls. Boys are different, aren't they? I suppose Monsieur Garve will get to work on his grandson now. They've called the boy Henri, after him."

Wilf looked at his large bedialed watch. "I'll have to be getting back, Vicky," he said. His manner, John thought, was insolently casual. "I'll try and get in again tomorrow."

Victoria went to see him to the door. When she returned, John

said, "He invites himself a bit too freely, Vicky. You ought to put him in his place, you know."

"His place? Ought I? I'm glad to have him visit, though. I find him restful."

John said, "That's an odd way of putting it. Restful is about the last thing I should say he was. I shouldn't have thought anyone would have described him like that."

"One doesn't have to make any effort with Wilf," Victoria said. "Anyway, I don't. Everything's simple and easy."

Katharine said, "That may not always be a good thing." She spoke with some coldness.

Victoria said, "Perhaps not. I don't want to argue about it."

"This question of the Leverton," John said. "We really must talk about that, Vicky."

"Not now," she said. "Sometime, but not now."

John had come from the office in the Lanchester. As they motored back to their own house, he said to Katharine, "Vicky seemed strange today. Didn't you think so?"

"Yes." It was cold; the sky ahead was gray, threatening more rain. The fields, beyond the rounded stone walls, were sodden and colorless. Katharine drew her furs more closely round her. "What is it you want her to do about the Leverton?"

"Isn't it obvious?"

"Sell to Sickert's? Do they want to buy?"

"I do. That's what counts."

"Is it?" She paused. "You've made great strides there, haven't you?"

"Sir Matthew depends on me." It was something he had never put into words before; he did so now with satisfaction. By speaking of it he confirmed to himself the awareness he had had, since returning to the company, of his new importance. "And I think it would be a good thing from every point of view."

"What about Tom Wainwright?"

"I can handle him."

She said, "So it turns out the place you were keeping for Lye you can fill yourself. The effort hasn't been wasted after all."

He said roughly: "I can't fill Lye's place. I've never thought I could."

"You would like to get the Leverton, wouldn't you?"

"I want to handle it the way Lye would have done. He would have brought it into Sickert's if he'd lived."

The certainty of this seemed to him beyond dispute. The reason Lionel had left Sickert's had been because of his impatience with the conservative old men who frustrated his plans and energies and treated him with humorous contempt. It was obvious that, given the chance, Lionel would have preferred the wider field to work in, and obvious that he would have recognized John's ascendancy over the board and that this gave him his opportunity. Lionel would have come back to Sickert's. There was an example to follow, a pattern to complete as nearly as one could.

Katharine said, "She doesn't seem to care." She was half wondering, half bitter. "It's just as though she had forgotten everything about him."

He knew what she meant and warmed to it. There could be a bond, he saw, in which the unhappiness and frustration and humiliation of the past two and a half years would dissolve. But he did not want to think of it now. There would be time enough.

"She will have to talk about it," he said. "I shall force her to talk."

It was not to prove easy. John tried on a number of occasions to open the subject or, at least, to persuade Victoria to name a time and place, but she continually evaded his attempts. Finally, one afternoon when he found her at his home, playing with the children, he cut through her vague half-promises and said, "The fact is, Vicky, I think you ought to sell out. Even if you knew anything about it, it's not a woman's business. I know I can get you a good price from Sickert's—you'd be better off from the standpoints of both capital and income."

"Sell?" she said. She offered him a puzzled smile. "We'll have to think about it." She bent down to little Lionel. "Darling, no, the elephant comes next."

He shook his blond curly hair. "The crocodile can't wait," he said. "He wants his supper."

She got right down beside him, laughing. "What supper?"

"Pigeons. He eats them raw. He would like to have sauce with



them, but Nanny says sauce is bad for him. So he eats them raw."

John said, "I wish you would listen to me, Vicky. It's a very important matter."

"So is the question of which comes first. In the nursery, more so."

"The crocodile comes first," little Lionel said. "It's because he's hungry."

"Please listen."

"I have been listening." She looked up, throwing her hair back. "You think I ought to sell the Leverton, and you say Sickert's will give me a good price for it if I do. You see, I heard you. We'll think it over."

"We?"

"Well, I'll have to discuss it with Wilf, won't I?"

With exasperation, he said, "There's no need for you to discuss anything with Wilf. Wilf's your hired man. I'm not saying he isn't a good manager, but managing isn't ownership and never will be."

Little Lionel said, "The camel is hungry, too, but he only eats hay. And apples. And p'raps a banana—"

John said, "Be quiet, Lionel. You can see I'm talking to Auntie Vicky."

Lionel stopped at once and looked at the floor, trying to hide the flush of embarrassment on his cheeks. He had made early acquaintance with language, and with the sense of shame.

"It's his room," Victoria said. "We ought not to be discussing grown-up things here."

"Damn it!" John said. "Haven't you been avoiding my attempts to discuss them in a proper place?"

Reprovingly she said, "Be careful how you speak, at any rate." She hesitated. "Did you know that Lye was going to turn the Leverton into a limited company after the war, and make Wilf a director of it?"

"There were a lot of things he might have done. It would have depended on what happened elsewhere. I think he would have come back to Sickert's. In fact, I know he would."

She stared at him. "You think he would have let Wilf down?"

"Don't be silly. Lye never let anyone down. He could have

looked after Wilf just as well if they were both in Sickert's—better, in fact."

"Wilf wouldn't go back to Sickert's. They sacked him."

"Good God, that was ten years ago!"

"It doesn't make any difference."

Mastering his annoyance, John said, "In any case, what Lye would or would not have done is beside the point. The question is, What happens to the Leverton? You must sell to someone. Surely it's better to deal with me than with a stranger?"

"Must I sell?" she asked. "That's what I'm not sure about."

"There's no one to run it!"

She exhaled impatiently. "Oh, John! Wilf has been running it for the past four and a half years."

"In wartime," he pointed out. "With government orders piling in faster than you could clear them. The whole thing's been routine. From now on it's going to be different. Orders will have to be looked for, plans will have to be made. That's not Wilf's line of country."

Victoria smiled with parted lips. "I've promised we'll think it over."

"All right," he said. "Think it over." He was angry and, to avoid displaying this, turned away to go out of the room. Before he reached the door, he recalled the need for conciliation. If Victoria had become difficult, there was no sense in running the risk of making her worse. He stood by the door and looked back. She had begun to play with little Lionel again. "Vicky," he said.

"Yes."

"What about you and Wilf having lunch with me at the Midland? Tomorrow, if you can make it."

A smile fixed like a mask on her face. She said, "Lunch at the Midland? With me and Wilf?"

He ignored the oddness of her manner. "Yes."

"And then all of us have coffee together in the Winter Garden? Is that what you mean?"

"Is there anything wrong with that?"

The smile faded like a ghost. She shook her head. "No. Nothing wrong. I'll find out if Wilf can come."

"Good."

She stared at him for a few seconds and then turned away. She said in a distant, dismissing voice, "I'll telephone you in the morning, John."

"Don't forget."

She did not reply, but began to play with the child. He watched them a little while and went away.

When they came out of the restaurant, it was Victoria who chose the table at which they were to sit. She paused in the entrance to the Winter Garden, as though taking bearings, and then led the way to a table against the rails, under a palm tree. She sat down and indicated chairs to the two men. Wilf took his ungracefully. The tie he was wearing was a brightly colored rag. John found it reassuring that his rank was so plainly stamped on him. He pictured him entertaining a buyer, perhaps from the Continent. The notion was pleasantly ludicrous.

"That was a very nice luncheon, John," Victoria said. "And the wine. I feel quite hazy."

He said, "I hope not too hazy. The idea is to talk about the Leverton."

"Go ahead."

He looked from her to Wilf. Wilf was sitting back with a faintly brooding expression. He had left his wine almost untouched at the table and had refused John's offer of beer.

"I think we could have a liqueur with the coffee," John said. "What will you have, Vicky?"

"Now you're putting it off," she said. "Thank you. Can I have a kirsch?"

"For auld lang syne?" He smiled. "I'll have the same. What about you, Wilf?"

"Whatever you're having."

He called to a waiter and gave the order. Then he said, "Now we can get on with it." He glanced at Wilf again. "I'd like you to let me have my say out first, before you comment. We can always iron out details later. You know the basis of my proposition. The Leverton is the kind of mill that Sickert's wants, and Sickert's can give security and the best prospect of expansion to the Leverton."

It's a natural marriage, and I'm convinced that Lye, if he had lived, would have been the first to agree to it."

Victoria said impatiently, "Let's not talk about what Lye would have agreed to or not agreed to. He's dead. We can't ask him."

He was a little shocked. "All right, I'll come to the offer. The board are prepared to pay you fifty thousand in cash, Vicky, plus a hundred and twenty thousand shares in Sickert's. The price this morning was seventeen shillings, three ha'pence. That gives them a cash value of over a hundred thousand, though if you did want to sell you would be well advised not to dump them all at once. Naturally the price would drop if you did. And in my view they are well worth holding. They offer a very good yield and good prospects of growth."

He paused, waiting for a reaction.

She said, "It seems a lot of money."

"It is a lot of money. You won't get as good an offer anywhere else, and to be quite honest you might not get it at all in a year's time. At present there's money about—expansion's in the air. It's the sort of condition that may not last. You ought to take advantage of it while you can."

"There's no need for a slump," Wilf said, "unless the capitalists cause one by trying to cut down the men's wages."

It was important, John thought, not to permit himself to be irritated by anything that was said. It was not simply a matter of concealing annoyance; he had learned that he negotiated best when he was able to keep his mind quite calm and impervious to provocations.

"You may be right," he said. "But I wasn't talking about a slump. A bit less buoyancy and confidence can make a lot of difference to prices, especially in the range we're talking about."

"Do you mean the offer's too generous?" Victoria said.

Wilf grinned. Before John could answer, he said, "You won't get aught that's too generous from Sickert's. If they gave you a pair of bootlaces they'd take the tags off first."

"Times change," John said, "even for Sickert's." He looked at Wilf. "You won't suffer by the Leverton being taken over, Wilf. At the very least you keep your old position. And there's scope for

moving up. There are bigger things than the Leverton in the organization."

There was an interval while the waiter brought the coffee and liqueurs.

Stirring sugar into his cup, John said, "What do you think about it?"

Wilf said, "I'll make it short and sweet. Go to hell."

John paused. "I was talking primarily to Vicky," he said.

"Yes," Wilf said. He took a sip from his liqueur glass and made a face. "Bit sour, this."

"Don't you like it?" Vicky asked. "It's made from cherries. We used to drink it when we came in from skiing." She smiled at John. "Do you remember that day at Champney when we were so cold and went into that little place and had fondue?"

He smiled in return. "I remember the stuffed eagle in the case on the wall."

She said, "Things will never be like that again, not even for the rest of us."

Wilf said, "If Sickert's takes over the Leverton, I'm packing it in. They sacked me once, and if they've changed I've not."

His interruption was crude and, John felt, evidence of insecurity. It threw into relief his own reasonableness.

He said, "I think that would be a mistake, Wilf, from everyone's point of view, including your own. I hope you can persuade him to change his mind, Vicky. We don't want to lose Wilf. There aren't that many good men around."

Wilf was staring at Victoria, almost scowling. Although John had known the extent of the man's devotion to Lionel, it had never occurred to him that there could be a devotion to Victoria as deep, or even deeper. Now in this look he recognized something—a commitment of man to woman. With surprise he reflected. He must fancy he's in love with her—and if so, in the last resort he will do what she tells him.

He said, "Wilf wants to serve your best interests, Vicky. I'm sure of that. And it's obvious where your best interests lie."

She put down her glass, smiling. "This is all silly, John. We're just taking up your time. Wilf and I have talked this over several times—again this morning. We aren't going to sell out. We're

going to run the mill the way Lye would have done. Or Wilf is, at any rate. You know I haven't anything to contribute."

He said sharply, "Don't be ridiculous, Vicky. How can you possibly run things the way Lye would have done?"

"Wilf knows what Lye's plans were. They talked them over together probably hundreds of times. In some ways, Wilf was closer to Lye than I was."

"Talking over plans isn't the same thing as putting them into practice! Lye built up the Leverton, but, with all due respect, Wilf isn't Lye. He has his abilities, but they're in a limited range."

"I'm the wrong class," Wilf said. "That's what you mean, isn't it?"

"No," John said, "it isn't. Though I don't suppose I could ever convince you of that. I believe you can be a good works manager, under the right conditions, but you haven't the temperament or ability to be anything better. And I said, under the right conditions. You need coddling, and there aren't that many owners who would coddle you the way Lye did."

He had spoken more bluntly than he intended, but although aware of the unwisdom of this he was still resentful of the alliance that had emerged between the two of them, an alliance which meant that all his earlier efforts had been for nothing. Involuntarily he reverted to the conviction that Victoria had only to be shown the man's inadequacy to understand the advantage of accepting the Sickert offer.

Wilf started to say something angrily. Victoria lifted her hand and he stopped. She said, "If that's true, I'll have to coddle him. But it's the other way around, John. Wilf looks after my interests better than I could do myself."

John said, "He got where he is through Lye having to go. Now he wants to hang on to it. I can see that he's looking after his own interests, but I'm not so sure where yours come in."

She cut in again before Wilf could say anything. "I'm sorry if we've upset you by refusing your offer, John. But please let's be friendly about it. Surely there doesn't need to be bad feeling?"

Her calmness was the more irritating for reminding him of his own earlier resolve. He had been quite confident that he would get his way, either with Wilf's co-operation or, if he were to prove

awkward, without it. It was Victoria, he saw, that he had failed to reckon with—the Victoria who, as a widow, was so changed, at once obstinate and conciliatory, persistent and indifferent, melancholy and lightheartedly trivial. Perhaps all this was due to the delayed shock of Lionel's death. Perhaps in a few months she would have returned to normal, and if he had delayed things till then . . . Whether or not that would have been the case, he had lost now. Sir Matthew would be unlikely to let him renew the offer, and anyway, with the commitment made plain, Wilf would have no difficulty in ensuring that Victoria kept to it.

With cold anger, he said, "Do you think it's so unimportant? Lye left nothing behind him but the Leverton."

Her face whitened. "I know that, John."

"We've had enough of this," Wilf said. "You're not to let him upset you, Vicky. Come on. I'll take you back home."

Wilf got to his feet and Victoria followed suit. John stood up with them

"Are you going with him?" he said.

"I think it would be best. Goodbye for now, John."

"Kitty will be very disappointed about this," he said.

"Will she? I'm sorry. I can't help it, though."

Katharine's reaction was not one of disappointment, but of confirmation in her earlier fears. They discussed Victoria at some length that evening, each of them, he thought, finding satisfaction and relief in it. They were able to talk about Lionel again, in the context of Victoria's unworthiness. At the bottom there was the unspoken compact—the assumption that, in different ways perhaps, he had meant more to them than to Victoria. This was demonstrated in nothing more clearly than in Victoria's choice of Wilf as her ally and her rejection of them; for it amounted to rejection. If Wilf's was the level on which she preferred to preserve her memories of the dead, then she must have loved on that level. It was a revelation that both found satisfying.

No open break followed from this, but the coolness which set in was unmistakable and grew more marked as the months passed. It applied also, to some degree, to the children. Nanny Kilter had never taken kindly to Victoria's irregular and unannounced in-

vasions of the nursery and now, sensing the new tone in the drawing room, became more firm in her admonitions and prohibitions; and Katharine, when Victoria protested once or twice, backed Nanny up.

The climax here came in the summer. There was a plan of long standing for spending a part of the first summer of the peace at La Jatte; and Victoria had suggested that she should travel out in advance, taking little Lionel with her, leaving Katharine to bring the other two boys at the end of the school term. In June, on one of her increasingly infrequent visits, Victoria raised the matter, tentatively, as though not expecting Katharine to agree. Had the tone of her proposal been more robust, Katharine might have accepted it. As it was, she detailed the objections: there was all this new business of passports and visas which would produce complications if the children were separated; and Nanny felt he was too small still to travel without her; and then, they were not absolutely sure they wanted to go to La Jatte this summer. The children, John thought, would prefer a seaside holiday here in England.

Victoria did not demur to these arguments. Katharine, talking of it with John later, had a spasm of regret, of guilt, perhaps, on this account.

"It's all perfectly true," she said, "but we did more or less agree to the idea last winter."

He glanced up from his copy of the *Guardian*. "We're not to be barred from changing our minds, are we?"

"Of course not. That's more or less what I said. She took it very meekly. Do you think I've been too cold to Vicky, not just now, but—well, since winter?"

He remembered the earlier estrangement that had existed between the sisters, inexplicable to him at the time. This was over Lionel, too, but he shared it. For a moment he was entangled in the dead briars of memories and regrets. This, he thought, is where one grows old, at the point where, for the first time, one can stand back from youth and see it as it was. He wrenched his thoughts free. The thorns, if one did not do so, would wound, and the wounds fester.

He said, "Why blame yourself for it? It's Vicky that has changed."



"Perhaps I should make more effort."

"It's not just you, though, is it? She wasn't at the Parkers' on Tuesday, and she wasn't at the Stanleys' garden party. She's losing touch with all her old friends. That's scarcely our fault."

Victoria went by herself to La Jatte, and the Burchalls, in the end, went to Scarborough. Katharine had still not seen her father, but they got over this by urging him to come back when Victoria returned to England and stay with them. In any event, Katharine was planning to take the children to La Jatte for the next season of winter sports.

Gilbert cried off at the last minute. He wrote that, from what he had read and what he had learned from Victoria, he did not think he would care for the changes that had taken place in England. He had grown used to his situation and did not wish to alter it. Moreover, as he remained in good health he felt there was no great urgency; he would look forward to seeing Katharine and his grandchildren, including the one he had not seen as yet, in the winter. Victoria would be returning by herself.

She returned in September, but it was three days after her return that she called on Katharine. John came back from the office to find the two sisters in the drawing room.

He said, "Hello, Vicky. Did you have a good trip back?"

Victoria smiled uncertainly. "Fairly good. The Channel crossing was a bit rough."

Katharine was standing by the window. She said in a rough voice, "Vicky has some news for us."

He looked at them both warily. "What news?"

"She is planning to get married again. To Wilf Maine."

### 3

**J**OHNSAID, "Is that a joke?"

Victoria said, "I know it's bound to seem strange at first. And I know you don't like him. But please don't make things too hard for me."

"Are they hard?" John asked. He went to the sideboard. "I think I'll have a whisky. When did you decide this, Vicky? You've only just got back from La Jatte. You didn't have our Wilfred out there with you, did you?"

"He asked me before I went out," she said. "I haven't rushed into this. I've thought about it for three months."

"I don't see why you needed three minutes. The thing to do was to send him off with a flea in his ear right away. I still can't believe you're serious."

Victoria said, "I think I'll have a drink, too, please. Scotch will do." Clearly she had braced herself for this encounter but was finding the going harder than she had expected. "Thank you, John."

"Forgive me for not drinking to the happy event. When is it to take place, by the way?"

"Quite soon. There doesn't seem to be a lot of point in waiting."

"None at all. Lye's been dead a good eight months. Why wait?"

She said, with tightened lips, "What do you believe—that after a year the dead lie still at last, that suddenly, from one day to the next, everything changes?"

"Even if it means nothing to you," John said, "you could offer a minimum of respect to his memory."

"Do you think that—that he doesn't mean anything to me?"

Her voice, itself naked and heavy with pain, was a bitter probe from which, instinctively, he flinched. He said, "That's not what I said. I'm talking about what others will think."

"Others? Do they matter?"

"Do you think it's fair to Lye," he countered, "to give people the chance to talk about his widow?"

"Lye's beyond fairness and unfairness. And he wouldn't have minded them talking."

That was true, he thought, and the realization of its truth brought him up short. But not the whole truth. The dead did not ask for flowers to be heaped above them, but all the same the flowers were their due. He thought of Lionel as he had seen him last, on the airfield in France, glad and confident and free of the merciless lottery of the trenches. He looked at Victoria with bewilderment.

"But why, Vicky?" he asked. "Tell me why."

She shook her head. "What good would it be?"

"Do you . . . think you're in love with him?"

She lifted her glass and put it down again. At the window, Katharine laughed.

"In love with Wilf Maine," Katharine said. "Or do you mean infatuation? How can a woman resist these big handsome men with the brilliant minds?"

Victoria said, "I've been very lonely since Lye died."

Katharine said, "Do you blame us for that? You chose Wilf six months ago when you turned John down over the Leverton. And it's not only us. There have been others. Lonely? If you were lonely, why spend three months at La Jatte where you were bound to feel worse?"

"I don't blame you," Victoria said. "It's not a question of blaming. I went to La Jatte because Lye died there." Closing her eyes, she looked, for a moment, lost and defeated. "At first, I thought I could keep him alive by myself. Then I thought per-

haps the place would help me—the fields and the sky and the balcony where we sat out together. But it didn't work. I suppose someone who was used to being lonely could have done it—you know, pictured things and made the pictures real. But it doesn't work for me. I have to have help."

"And you think Wilf will help you?" John asked.

"He does. It's not that we talk about Lye. I don't really like talking about him, because one can never say the things that are right—never quite right. It's just being with someone who knows what you are feeling. There's no need to pretend. Things are shared."

Katharine came toward her sister. She stood in front of her, staring, her breast rising and falling quickly.

"And is Wilf Maine the only one who can do that?" she said. "Do you think John was less fond of him than Wilf was? Do you think I didn't love him? As much as you—more?"

"I knew you loved him," Victoria said.

"Then why not us? Why Wilf Maine?"

"Because he doesn't envy me, as you do."

"Envy you?"

"You're both jealous of what I've had. It's nothing anyone can help. You've disapproved of me since Lye died—of what I've done, the way I've talked, everything. Partly it may be because of what you think is due to Lye, but it's not only that. You think I don't suffer enough—to make up for my good fortune in being married to him. You want me to suffer more—to show how much I'm suffering. And I've suffered enough, I tell you. People who look for pain are trying to convince themselves. I don't have to do that. I want to escape pain. Sometimes I think if I could forget him completely—wipe out every memory—I would do it. But I know I can't. The only thing I can do is share it, and Wilf is the only one I can share it with."

"That's how much you loved Lye," Katharine said scornfully. "To want to share him with Wilf Maine!"

"You haven't been listening to me," Victoria said. "You don't understand what I'm saying."

"We're getting too worked up," John said. "We've got to try to be sensible. Perhaps neither of us realized how badly you've

been hit, Vicky. You didn't show it much. Perhaps I let myself get too disappointed over the Leverton. It was a bit early to expect you to be quite rational over a thing like that."

"Rational?"

"Well, yes. I pushed too hard, perhaps. And since then . . . If it's our fault, I'm sorry. These things do happen. The important thing is to mend them before they go too far." He smiled encouragingly at her. "They certainly can be mended."

Katharine, who was now sitting on the couch, gave no sign either of agreement or of denial.

Victoria said, "I wish they could. Do believe I wish that."

"Look," John said, "you live alone in that house. It's no wonder you get depressed at times. And it must have been almost as bad at La Jatte. Why not come and stay with us here?" He glanced at Katharine. "We'll be glad to have you, won't we, Kitty?"

She said, in an even voice, "Of course we will."

"For how long?" Victoria asked.

"For as long as you care to stay," John said. "We're happy to have you, and you know the children will be. Take your time about sorting things out. There's no hurry."

He was pleasantly conscious of the generosity of the proposal, following Victoria's rejection, even betrayal, of them. Lionel, he thought, would have been glad of this. There was another thought which he admitted to consciousness quite frankly. In time, provided one was patient and made no attempt to rush things, it might still be possible to do something about the Leverton.

Victoria said, "Well, I suppose I could go back before the wedding. There wouldn't be any great ceremony, of course, but I imagine you wouldn't want to have it take place from here."

There was a short silence.

John said, "I think you should give a little more thought to the question of getting married again, Vicky. You've not been seeing things clearly. You've been upset. You need time to adjust."

"No, don't you see," she said, "I have adjusted—as much as I ever will. Don't you understand what I've been saying?"

"Well," John said, "give it a try. You may come to feel differently."

"And Wilf? He needs me, John."

She was hesitating, he thought. Careful coaxing argument would bring her round in the end.

But Katharine said harshly, "He needs you, or you need him—which is it?"

"Well, both. We've both lost Lyc."

"But he didn't sleep with him, did he?"

Victoria's blue eyes turned slowly to her sister. She said quietly, "Nor did I—for a long time before he died. And before that only for those few days of his leaves, with all the miserable months between."

"Do you think you're the only woman who's ever been deprived?" Katharine asked. "Is yours the only life that's been left empty?" She made a small gesture of disgust. "And Wilf Maine! I don't know how you can contemplate it."

Victoria said, "I don't contemplate it. Kitty, please. Must we talk like this?"

"And he hasn't contemplated it either, I suppose? A platonic marriage, perhaps. With that little—little ape. Oh, you disgust me!"

John made a motion to intervene, but then drew back. He was shocked by the turn Katharine had given to the conversation. It was embarrassing, and he was unsure to what it might lead, what else of the decently obscure might not be dragged out into the intolerant light of day.

Victoria said, "I'm sorry you feel like that. But there wouldn't be any point in my coming to stay here if you do, would there? I'm not going to give up seeing Wilf. And I'm not going to take back the answer I gave to him."

She was defiant, but there was weakness beneath the defiance; he had not been mistaken. Her eyes looked to his for a moment. But there was nothing he could do now. Katharine had committed herself, fully and passionately, and this afternoon, in some obscure way, Katharine had regained her ascendancy over him. He could not cross her.

"It comes to this," Katharine said, "that you must make a choice between Wilf Maine and us. You can't have both." She paused, seeming conscious of the finality expressed by her words;

she looked at Victoria and appeared to soften. "Vicky, do please think what you are doing. We've always been . . . We—I would help you if I could, in any way."

"But not by accepting Wilf."

"Be fair, Vicky! He wouldn't accept us either."

"He would try. If I asked him, he would try."

"Before you are married I'm sure he'll promise anything. When you're his wife, it may be different."

"You won't believe anything but the worst of him, will you? You may think me a fool if you like, but was Lye a fool? Lye trusted Wilf. One of the last things he said was to tell me I could rely on Wilf. He knew he was dying when he said that."

"He didn't know you would marry him!"

John said, "One man trusting another is not like the trust between a man and a woman."

Victoria said, "I trust Wilf as Lye trusted him. And I've said I will marry him. That's all there is to be said."

She took the glass from which she had not yet drunk and drained it quickly. Then she said, "I'd better go." She hesitated. "I would like to have said goodbye to the children."

"Nanny has taken them to tea at the Parkers'. They are not back yet."

"Of course." She smiled. "Give them my love."

When she had gone, Katharine said, "The fool." She spoke quietly, but with the force of spent passion. The emotion which had roused her still marked her features with distinction, even with beauty. She was a wonderful woman, John thought. Victoria was a straw creature beside her.

"She may not go through with it," he said. "When she has had time to think of it, she may change her mind."

"She won't." Katharine shook her dark head. "I know Vicky. There's more hardness in her than you might think."

"Well," he said, "there's nothing to be done just now. I must go to my study. I have some work to do."

Katharine made no reply, and they did not discuss Victoria again that evening. But afterward, for the first time in over three years, they shared the same bed.

# 4

THE NEWS they subsequently had of Victoria was irregular and scanty, since after the break she completed her withdrawal from the social circle to which they belonged. She had been married to Wilf, without ceremony, at the Register Office, and they were supposed to have gone to London for a brief honeymoon, or perhaps to Paris; the accounts of this were vague.

In January, as had been arranged, the Burchalls took the children to La Jatte. The Hôtel Édouard had been relinquished by the French authorities and, following a swift but comprehensive refurbishing, was open to tourists again, as were the other hotels in the village; but, partly for convenience with the children and partly to save expense—hotel prices had risen to what seemed a shocking extent since prewar days—they took a furnished house for the period of their stay: the Chalet des Gentianes. Like Chalet Fanshawe, it stood on the slopes above the village itself, but on the other side of the funicular. The house faced a rough road, at this time smoothed and softened by snow, which wound around, crossing under the funicular, to join the Champney road. John and Katharine walked along it to visit Gilbert while Nanny and the maid, Bessie, put the children and the chalet to rights.

Gilbert greeted them in a friendly but rather distant fashion.



He was wearing black trousers and a white silk shirt, with a thin black scarf loosely knotted at the neck; the effect, John felt, on a man of his age, was more macabre than elegant. When Katharine kissed him he held her off a little, presumably so that she would not rumple his shirt. But he seemed, for all that, genuinely glad to see them.

"The Gentianes," he said, "is it comfortable? It belonged to those Germans, you know, the Hessburgs. I've no idea what became of them. I understand one of the Montreux agents is handling things."

"I remember them," Katharine said. "The agents said they had sold it—to someone local. Papa, you haven't changed."

"Did you expect me to have changed? I sent you my photograph."

She smiled. "A photograph doesn't show everything."

Logs burned brightly on the fire. Gilbert stood beside it, his thin, wrinkled hands held down toward the source of warmth. He said, "No, I haven't changed. Sometimes one thinks one is changing, for a time, and then things are as they were again. People do not change."

John said, "Don't you think circumstances change them, sometimes?"

"Not basically. A different side of things may be brought out, but it is never irreversible. How are the children?"

"Very well. Aching to get into the snow."

"You must bring them to see me," Gilbert said, the formality of the invitation setting out its own limits. "But I don't want to take them too much from the snow."

Katharine smiled. "I shan't let them pester you." She went on casually, "Have you heard from Vicky lately?"

His face narrowed into disapproval. "Only briefly. I understand you have not seen her since this wedding." He made it sound at once trivial and enormous. "I would not blame you for that. I am very disappointed in Vicky."

Katharine said, "One supposes she is old enough to know her own mind."

"I fail to comprehend it," Gilbert said. "I have tried, but I cannot grasp her motives."

John said, "And you haven't met Wilf!"

"I can well believe he is a poor creature. That isn't important. It is the remarriage that amazes me. And she gave me no hint of it during all the time she was here in the summer. Only when she was leaving she said something about perhaps having news for me soon, and that I would not care for it. I don't understand."

"So people can change," John said. "Vicky has."

"It was there," Gilbert insisted. "Whatever it was, it was there." He paused, his eyes reflective. "It was a strange time, those last months with Lionel. He was a dying man, but somehow he engaged one more deeply in life. That was true of me. It was as though one lived on his vitality, entered the world on his shoulders. And when he was gone there was an emptiness. One became oneself again—what one had always been. And perhaps the more so for having escaped it for a while." He made a small waving motion with his hand. "I was very pleased, John, to learn that you are progressing so well in business. Lionel was pleased, too. We talked of you, of course."

It was as though he referred to a conversation about a child with another adult who had just left the room. John did not resent it. He said, "I would have liked to carry on with Lye's plans for the Leverton mill. You know about that."

Gilbert nodded regretfully. "Yes. It is a pity."

From the window, Katharine said, "Didn't you say the French had left Chalet Russe?"

"Of course."

"Someone has a fire lit. There's smoke from the chimney."

"Age makes its mark," Gilbert said. "I am growing forgetful. I meant to tell you that the General has come back."

"I didn't even know he was still alive!" Katharine said. "And the others?"

"No, not the others."

She stared at her father. "What has happened to them?"

"Minna is dead, it seems. There is no news of the children."

"Can we go in to see him? Now?"

She spoke with an impulsiveness which, never a marked feature in her, had for some years been absent. All at once she was young again.

Gilbert said, "I am not sure it would be wise. Things will be in confusion, and I believe he has little help."

"Peppi will want to see old friends," Katharine said, "however great the confusion. You stay, Papa. We will slip across."

They put on their coats and overshoes and went down the snowy steps to the road, and from there to the drive leading up to Chalet Russe. The gateposts stood with their iron hooks empty; the heavy wooden gates had gone, presumably for firewood during the time the French had occupied the chalet. Snow was very thick on the drive, marked only by a single set of footprints. As they approached the house itself, it was possible to see how badly in need of repair and renovation it was. A broken shutter hung from one window; the next had none at all. There was glass missing from the porch and the outer door had a splintered panel. The terraces of the garden above the house were ruinous even under the covering of snow, and the little summerhouse was gone, leaving a mound at one end of the broken trellis that the roses had climbed over.

They had to wait for some time after ringing the bell before they heard the sound of footsteps approaching from within the house. It was a slow tread but a firm one.

An accented voice called, "*Je viens! Je viens tout de suite.*"

He stared at them for a moment when he had thrown the door open.

Katharine said, "You've not forgotten us, Peppi?"

He smiled slowly, with the same twinkling slyness. That alone remained unaltered. The spade beard had gone and he had white hair, thinning to baldness on top. His frame was still large, but the flesh appeared to hang loosely on it. He was dressed in an old uniform that John recognized after a time; it was such as the Tulenkov coachmen had worn in the old days.

"Kitty!" he said. "And John. Come in, come in, please. Everything is in a great mess, but you will not mind. Come and I will make some tea for you."

They followed him into the house. Paint had been scraped or peeled off the walls, the large inlaid mirror was cracked from one corner to the other. A good deal of the furniture was missing, and

in one corner of the hall there was a dark hole where floorboards had been taken up and not replaced.

Katharine said, "You must not trouble yourself, Peppi. We were visiting Papa and couldn't resist coming across when we heard you were back. We mustn't stay long."

"No trouble," he said cheerfully. "I am finding things all the time, and this morning I found a samovar. There is more left than one would think. Come in here, Kitty. At present I live entirely in the dining room. It is easier, and it saves heat."

The room was clean and tidy, but very shabby. In places the gold-embossed wallpaper had been torn away in strips, and the ceiling was cracked and crumbling. For furniture there were two nonmatching upright chairs, an armchair, a wooden rocking chair, the big mahogany dining table, scored and pitted from abuse, and an iron single bed. Here and there blocks of wood had been torn out of the floor, but where the parquet was still undamaged it had been polished to a high gloss. Fire crackled in the big fireplace.

"It is not very handsome," Tulenkov said, "but it serves. Sit down now, while I put on the samovar. I have a little tea, and lemon."

"Oh, how dreadful!" Katharine said. "Is it all like this, Peppi?"

"In the other rooms it is worse," he said. "But the billiard table is in perfect condition, and not a cue missing. They have looked after that for me."

"You must be entitled to compensation," John said.

Tulenkov nodded. "There will be compensation. But for the present, they argue. The Swiss argue with the French, and they both argue with me. Our housekeeper died early in the war, and of course there was no list of contents." He laughed. "And of course I do not know what there was here, either!"

Katharine said, "Papa told us about Minna. We're so sorry, Peppi."

He smiled. "There is nothing for which to be sorry—one should be glad, rather. She died early in 1915, when the war news was still good. She felt ill, just a little, in church, and when she got home she said she would lie down for a while. She died like that, quite peacefully."

"And Trina," Katharine asked, "and Alex?"

"One must hope. Russia is a big country. I have heard rumors, some good, some bad, but nothing certain. I think our people would look after Trina, hide her maybe, and look after Alex if he managed to find his way back there. He was with the White Guards the last news I had of him. I don't know whether they are still fighting. One cannot believe much of what one hears."

"How did you manage to get out yourself?" John asked.

"Ah, that is a dull story! Tricks and evasions, hiding and dodging, bargaining with guards on trains—I do not wish to recall all that. I am here, and that is enough." The General stared out the window at the snow. "What a country this Switzerland is! Such peace, tucked away in the heart of this sad continent. And they have let me into their haven, though I bring them nothing but an old man's body."

"And now, Peppi," Katharine said, "what are you going to do?"

I am more fortunate than many Russians who have come to the West. I have this house and just a little money here in Switzerland. If I had been wise I would have had more, but what wisdom was there in our generation? I shall become an innkeeper—no, a guest-house keeper! But first I must see that the chalet is in order. It will take me some time, I think."

Steam was hissing from the samovar.

"Excuse me," he said, "while I get things from the kitchen. I will not be long."

Katharine said in horror, "Poor Peppi."

"That's the coachman's uniform," John said. "Probably the big fellow with the wall eye. I suppose it was left in one of the box rooms and he found it. His own clothes were probably in rags."

"Alex and Trina—do you think . . . ?"

"God knows. It doesn't seem very likely."

Returning, Tulenkov said, "The cups do not match, I fear. You will not mind, I think."

"I don't know what to say," Katharine said. "You've had so much to bear, Peppi."

"It is the common lot today. You also have had losses. The fair Lionel." He shook his head. "The samurai of business. But he

died in my profession. Was all this six years ago? It seems much more, or much less."

"If they manage to get away as you did," Katharine suggested, "Alex and Trina will come here, too?"

"That is my hope. Where else should they go?"

"And so you will run the chalet as a guest house until they come," John said, "or until the counterrevolution succeeds?"

Tulenkov handed a cup to Katharine and another to John. The one he kept for himself had no handle. He rubbed his thin hair, smiling.

"There will be no counterrevolution," he said. "It is all finished, that. This war has destroyed the aristocrats. Most plainly in Russia, but in other countries too. Germany, Austria—France and England also, I think, although there it may take longer. The best one can hope for is the bourgeois democracy *à la suisse*. All over Europe the war became a civil war. And it was our fault, of course. We destroyed each other and destroyed ourselves. We cannot blame the lower classes. They fought as we ordered them until we drove them too hard. And the strange thing is that while at the beginning it was we who thought we had the things to fight for while they had nothing, in the end we have lost everything and they have gained it."

It was beginning to snow. Large flakes floated down outside the window, issuing softly from the hard gray sky.

"I used to be interested in ancient Greece," Tulenkov said. "I had a passion for the Athenians. I admired them above all the nations of history, and yet—" he lifted his hands—"I was amazed by the folly that destroyed them. To risk all, as they did, on the Sicilian expedition was like a man wagering his life against a guinea. Such stupidity in a people of such wisdom was beyond my comprehension. I could not forgive them for it, for putting so small a value on their own excellence. They had no right to make that hazard."

He sipped his tea. Where his collar gaped John saw the long red line of a scar across his neck.

"What we had was not Athens," he said. "But it was not without merit. And we threw it away as carelessly as the Athenians did, in defiance of all logic and good sense. And so the Spartans

have pulled down the great wall and sit playing dice in the Acropolis. And the soldiers die, one by one, in the quarries of Sicily. We learn nothing from history—except, perhaps, resignation.”

During the spring of 1920, Sir Matthew Sickert began to fail. He took to walking with a stick, and his eyesight became even poorer. One day, when a chair was left in an unfamiliar position in his office, he collided with it and fell heavily, bruising his hip. It was thought that he would be away for some time, but the following morning he came as usual to the office, leaning more heavily on his stick and limping badly. He also called a board meeting for that afternoon.

John arrived first, together with James Sickert. The latter had picked up some gossip concerning the Leverton mill in the course of his luncheon and now retailed it.

“If things are like that,” John said, “he’ll have to draw his horns in. There’s nothing else he can do.”

“Well, he’s still looking for the money for expansion. Alan knew of three tries he’d had at getting hold of it. The last one was old Pilton. He told him he didn’t lend against short-time working even to people he trusted. So he could draw his own conclusions.”

“They’re not getting the orders, are they?”

“Who is?” James asked. “But they’re getting less.”

They got to their feet as Sir Matthew made his slow, awkward entry, followed by the two Wainwrights and Clarkson.

“Sit down, gentlemen,” he said. “I think I’ll sit down myself.” He dropped into his chair. “When I’m down I think I’ll be more comfortable standing up, and when I’m standing up I find I have to sit down.”

The others took their places, with Clarkson beside Sir Matthew.

“This is an extraordinary meeting, gentlemen,” Sir Matthew said, “so we have no official agenda. There’s one item of news I offer you with great regret. Clarkson’s made up his mind he’s too old for the job. He’ll be seventy next month, and he’s retiring then. I know I’m speaking for the rest of you when I say how much we regret his leaving and how grateful we are for all his past services.”

He spoke in a perfunctory manner. John had the impression that he resented the news he had to give. Clarkson had been with him for nearly half a century; his leaving would represent a running away in the face of age, a dereliction of their shared duty. Sir Matthew looked at Clarkson briefly and nodded to him, before turning back to the others.

"We're all growing older," he said, "even you young ones. But you've got some room to maneuver. I haven't much myself. I don't think I need to tell you I shall carry on here as long as I'm able; but we don't know how long that will be, do we? So I've been considering the question of what's to happen when I'm not able. I don't do it with any relish, but it's got to be done."

John awoke suddenly to the importance of the words—to the crucial nature of the meeting. He felt a brief nausea, a sense of emptiness. Another year or two, he felt, and he would have been able to establish his ascendancy over Wainwright. The old man had weakened too soon. If Lionel had come back . . . He forced himself back to attentiveness; there might be something one could snatch at.

"One time, I used to think my boy would take things over. Even after he left the firm, I thought he would come back when he was a few years older. Well, the war fixed that for me. Since that time, I think I've seen things a bit straighter. I may say, gentlemen, that I've already had a talk today with Andrew. We're the old men of this company, and it's only right we should look to each other."

Andrew Wainwright smiled broadly. It was altogether reasonable that he should inherit control from his cousin. But he was only four years younger and both physically and mentally burdened by the weight of flesh he carried. And Sir Matthew was not giving up yet. The future he had been considering was not an immediate one, and he probably still expected to outlast the elder Wainwright. In that case the talk with him had had a different purpose. To agree on Tom? Wainwright's cheerfulness did not mean much in general, but did it now indicate satisfaction at having the succession assured to his son? John looked covertly at Tom Wainwright. He had learned to gauge Tom's expressions



over the years. He was sure that if Tom were to take over he had not yet been told of it. There was uncertainty there. There was also some confidence. Tom had worked out the probabilities too and was fairly satisfied with what they showed him.

"We both agree," Sir Matthew said, "that we need to look to the future. That rules out Andrew himself. Andrew was the first to say this. He wouldn't want to take on more responsibility, in any case."

James Sickert was playing with a pencil, nervously, his usual calmness ruffled. With a shock, John understood that James had not ruled himself out of this reckoning, and saw that there were grounds which might justify his hopes. He was the old man's closest kin. Moreover, he was the only Sickert remaining after him. And his father, the Colonel, had been perhaps the one man who had commanded Sir Matthew's unstinted respect.

"James, then," Sir Matthew said. He shook his head slowly. "I don't think James is strong enough. You can't blame a man for bad health, but you can't ask a man who's plagued with illness to take charge of something like Sickert's."

James put down the pencil carefully. He smiled at his uncle.

"I'm sure you're quite right, sir," he said.

Sir Matthew nodded. "Andrew agrees with me. That leaves us with Tom and Burchall here."

John was looking for nuances, though beyond a certain point there was a risk of too much subtlety, of reading things into rather than out of expressions and intonations. The manner of reference to them both, for instance: Sir Matthew had always confined his use of Christian names to members of the Sickert family, and he could hardly change that at this stage, even if he wanted to. But the "here"—contemptuous, dismissing? The sense of defeat repossessed John. Another two years—even a year . . .

"Burchall is a very able young man," Sir Matthew said. "We're all agreed on that. On the other hand, the only stock he holds is what has come to him in bonuses from time to time. And, of course, Sickert's has always been a family firm, and he is not a member of the family."

John settled back slightly in his chair. His nod of acknowledg-

ment and the smile he produced were convincing enough. He wondered if this was how James had felt, a few moments earlier: this sense of acceptance, relief, almost of satisfaction.

"We thought about that," Sir Matthew went on. "And we've decided that these objections should not be allowed to carry too much weight. The first can be remedied easily enough. For the second, the value would be that a member of the family might be expected to have a deeper concern for the firm's interests than someone from outside would. But that isn't always the case."

He was tired. In any case, this was only a matter of showing fairness. John refused to look at any other possibility. As long as he refused he was free from the feeling of helplessness, and he was determined not to surrender to it again. He could not help being defeated, but it was not necessary to be humiliated as well.

"So we felt we could look at these two young men from the point of view of ability only—from the point of view of what will best benefit Sickert's in the long run. We've given the matter a lot of thought, and a little argument. I've considered Andrew's views very carefully, but in the long run, as the majority stockholder, I have to make the decision. And my decision is that, while Tom is a very able young man, John Burchall is the man in whose hands the interests of Sickert's will be best served. Andrew has given me his agreement. I would like to have the consent of the remaining members."

James said, "You have mine, with the greatest of pleasure."

He seemed genuinely pleased. John was not sure now whether his earlier nervousness had been due to ambition for himself or to concern about Wainwright's prospects; he had never got on with him particularly well.

Tom Wainwright looked at John, not Sir Matthew. He said, "Congratulations."

John nodded. "Thanks."

Sir Matthew said, "I take it you are also agreed, Tom?"

"Yes, Mr. Chairman," Wainwright said. "I'm agreed."

"The question of stock holdings remains," Sir Matthew said. "You might as well know that I've seen Plassey about a new will."

His look directed the remark to John. John said, "I'm very

grateful for the confidence you have in me, sir; but I don't think there's any need for that."

"Leave me judge it." He smiled coldly. "A will doesn't mean anything until the testator's out of the way. And that may not be for some time."

After the meeting, Tom Wainwright followed John to his office. He closed the door behind him.

"Spare me a minute?" he asked.

"Yes, of course."

"I've come to dot the *i*'s. I don't see why you and I shouldn't get on together, John."

"Do you think that so far we haven't?"

"Under the new conditions."

John said slowly, "I don't see that anything's changed yet. Things will carry on as they have been doing."

"No, they're changed."

"What do you want, Tom?"

The question was blunt and carried the blunter implication. State your interests. He sensed the difference in himself and knew what Wainwright had said was right.

"I want to avoid something," Wainwright said. "I want to avoid being isolated. You heard what the old boy said at the end about new blood. We've a small board for a firm as big as ours. I wouldn't be surprised if he brings Scarisbrook in, and someone from that finance company."

John nodded. "Perhaps so. Well?"

"I'm being realistic. If I don't get things right between us—a proper understanding—I might find myself in a corner eventually. I might even find myself outside. I'm anxious not to have that happen."

"I would be very sorry if it did."

"And you might need someone backing you. There could be advantages. James is not much good to you from that point of view."

John said, "If you're proposing an alliance, I'll be very happy to accept."

Wainwright offered his hand, and John took it. It occurred to him that if the situation had been reversed he would not have

been in a position to suggest such a compact, even had he been minded to. It was another indication of how much the odds had been against him in the first place; he felt a shudder of pleasure at the new confirmation of his success.

"That's it, then," Wainwright said. "I don't think we'll have much trouble getting on together. The main thing is that I should give you best, isn't it?" He smiled. "Well, I do. There were two things that beat me. I've known about them for a long time."

John said curiously, "What things?"

"The mess I made over the Whitedale was one. I knew the old boy wouldn't forget that."

"And the other?"

"Did you see the grin on my father's face?"

"That's nonsense. You're not implying he was against you? It was made pretty obvious that he'd supported you against me."

"He put in a token word, all right. But he was happy enough to be overruled. If he'd wanted me to have it, I'd have had it. My God, isn't it obvious? He had the first claim himself. If he was passed over, he could have insisted on me taking his place."

Without accepting the argument, John accepted that Wainwright believed it to be true. The thought disturbed him. He said, "This is silly, Tom. He's your father."

"Exactly. And he couldn't stand the idea that I might become of more consequence to the firm than he had ever been. If the old boy had wanted me, he'd still have found some reason for turning me down."

"You haven't any children."

"No. What does that mean?"

"You don't understand how a father feels toward his sons. What you've been saying doesn't make sense."

"To you, perhaps not."

"To anyone."

Wainwright shrugged. "It's not worth arguing. I'm telling you how it was. You don't have to believe me." He looked at John curiously. "You think a lot of your kids, John, don't you?"

"No more than usual."

"There isn't a usual," Wainwright said. "Every case is a special case."

That summer there was a newer, more demanding note in John's affection for his sons. The new prospect which had opened out for him offered an even greater scope for their futures. His ambition for them began to range much higher. They were capable, intelligent boys; there was no saying what they might not achieve.

Richard, at eight, was perhaps the least distinguished in intelligence, but he was still a reasonably clever boy and had a natural verve and confidence which enabled him to take the lead among boys of his own age. He was also assisted by his physique; he was a tall boy, with good bone and muscles that responded well to his calls on them. In the autumn he would be going away to preparatory school. He talked about this a good deal, with the keenest anticipation.

The two younger boys did not promise quite such physical excellence, but they had good bodies and, in two quite different ways, exceptionally good minds. Stephen, who had retained shyness and reserve from the earliest years, showed a cool competence in his school work, effortlessly maintaining a position at the head of his class. Lionel was both more variable and more imaginative. He had a sunnier, more open nature, a tendency toward naughtiness for curiosity's sake—a willfulness, occasionally, that his eagerness and precocity made it impossible not to forgive. He was spoiled, by his eldest brother as well as by Nanny and his parents, but retained an ingenuousness, an effervescence of good spirits, which were always charming. His intelligence, when he applied it, was of an entirely different order to Stephen's. Watching him construct a bridge out of Richard's Meccano parts, John was moved to awe; it staggered him to contemplate the potentialities of this son of his who was not yet six.

Katharine took them to Scarborough for a month, and John joined them for a fortnight of the time. The weather was fair for the greater part, and he spent most days with the boys, sometimes together with Katharine and Nanny on the beach, other times on expeditions where he had them to himself. Their variety

was a continual delight. From the pleasure of observing Richard's enterprise and practical competence, he turned to Stephen's quiet reflective shrewdness and to the bright flashes of awareness that continually displayed themselves in Lionel's chatter. Being in closer, more continuous contact with them than was generally possible, he studied them more closely and studied his attitude toward them. In attempting to assess the latter, he tried one day to catch himself out in some special feeling for one above the others. But it did not exist. If he had a favorite, it was at a level of which he was ignorant. He pursued the question to a point which he recognized as absurd—a nightmarish vision of the three of them struggling in the waves and himself able to save only two, or even one. The agonizing produced no result, except the practical one of a new enthusiasm for teaching them to swim. By the end of the fortnight, Richard was tolerably accomplished at it.

In October, Gilbert Fanshawe paid them his one visit. He came practically unannounced, telephoning from a hotel in London, and stayed only a few days. Loud noises appeared to upset him, and he was particularly susceptible to the racket caused by the children. In the evening, while John gave him sherry in the drawing room, his glances—as much of apprehension as of irritation—were continually drawn to the ceiling: the boys had been moved into the bedroom immediately above during a re-decoration of the nursery.

"I'm sorry about the din," John said. "It's bad luck the nursery's out of commission just now."

"It amazes me," Gilbert said, "that, staying awake so late, they still manage to show such boisterous energy so early in the morning."

"This house is too small for us. We really need one where they can be tucked away, out of sight and carshot. We had been thinking of getting something bigger this year, but we decided against it."

Gilbert winced at a new series of thumps. "What decided you?" he asked. "Not financial insecurity—you have the very highest prospects in the business."

"I prefer to wait, rather than to move into a house we may want to discard again in a year or two."

"I see," Gilbert smiled. "I do see. But why not anticipate? Your natural caution, I suppose."

"I don't believe in anticipation. And I don't want to give the impression I'm taking too much for granted."

"I gather from that that what you have in mind will be a very impressive establishment."

John smiled. "You will have to come and stay with us again. At least I think I will be able to guarantee no noise from the children."

"I will," Gilbert said, "if I live so long."

John said, "It's not a case of waiting for someone's death. Only till he retires, and he can't carry on for much longer. He's arthritic—badly so. Just getting from his car to his office is a daily torture. And it gets worse all the time."

"You've done very well, John. I can remember talking of your future with Lionel, in the billiard room of the Edouard, all those years ago. He thought you would do well, but I don't think he guessed how well."

John brought over the decanter and refilled Gilbert's glass. He said, "I was making a place for Lye. That was true until he died."

"And now the place is yours. Lionel would have been pleased."

There was a pause before John said, "You went to see Vicky yesterday. What did you think?"

"Of Maine? I was prepared to dislike him, and prepared therefore to make allowances for my own prejudice. But the allowances were insufficient. I disliked him to an even greater degree than I had expected."

"I don't understand how Vicky came to marry him."

"I believe I do. Vicky has always been a strange mixture of self-centeredness and dependence. When they were children she could do nothing without Kitty, but she was continually struggling to make Kitty acknowledge her own leadership. I remember once when they were quite small, in the Boboli in Florence, what a scene she created when Kitty would not go by the paths she

chose; and this followed an hour's tearful pleading that Kitty should be allowed to go at all—she had committed some small crime and was to have stayed at home as a punishment. For Vicky, there must always be one person. Until his death, that was Lionel."

"You're not suggesting that Lionel was ruled by Vicky, are you?"

"It was enough that he was devoted to her; and he was, of course. This was as true at the end as it had been at the beginning. She was the only woman in his life; no other ever impinged. That is a singleness of attention which few men can give." He glanced at John, his eyes narrowed and smiling. "Not you, I fancy."

"That doesn't explain Wilf."

"I think it does. She thought he could give her the same thing. If she had no hope of loving in the way she had loved Lionel, at least she could be loved. That would fill much of the emptiness. And that is why you and Kitty were no help to her; why I was not, either."

"Was she right?"

"What do you think?"

"I've scarcely seen them since they were married."

"They seem happy enough," Gilbert said. "But Vicky would put up an appearance for me, anyway—and perhaps for Maine also. She could never admit a mistake."

"There have been one or two rumors about the mill doing less well."

"The Leverton mill? They can hardly have been well founded. She was telling me that Maine is building an extension which will almost double their output."

"I know of the plans. There was some doubt as to the financing."

"They are starting construction right away. I imagine you still regret not having been able to take it over?"

"I'm too busy these days to have regrets."

"That doesn't hold. I have never been busy in my life, and until lately I never had regrets."

"What do you regret now?"



"I don't think I know," Gilbert said. "Perhaps if I did I should know better how to cope. It is a vague malaise. The mind cannot come to grips with it."

"Why did you make this visit to England?" John asked. "It was not simply to see us for a few days, though we've been glad to have you."

"I came for a medical checkup."

"Surely there are excellent doctors in Montreux?"

"Of course. But one's nationalism is something which may come to the fore quite unexpectedly. I decided to come to Harley Street."

"How serious is it?"

The bluntness of the question appeared to offend Gilbert. His hands made a small gesture of negation.

"Not at all serious. I have been reassured. Of everything but the sense of regret and, as I say, I don't know on what the regret is based. But the trip has been worth while. I have seen you in your home, and I have seen what London is like these days, and I will return to La Jatie with a mind at rest."

John wondered whether to believe him. He looked fit, for one of his years, and he spoke placidly, in his usual precise diction. Yet there was something that did not jibe—something over and above the surprising break from his long-established routine of life abroad, and his talk of regrets, but perhaps involving them. John spoke about it afterward to Katharine, but she did not agree that there was anything strange. Vague regrets and a sudden concern for health were both to be expected in an aging man.

John dismissed his own doubts. They saw Gilbert off for London on Sunday afternoon, with the children in attendance. Victoria was not present, and none made reference to this. The goodbyes were said, and as the train began to move Gilbert gave one small final wave and withdrew from the window, pulling it up as he did so.

The last arrangements had been that they would see him in La Jatte the following January. He died, however, before Christmas, of the cancer whose presence had been confirmed in London before his visit to them. He died alone, as he wished, having

taken precautions to ensure that no one was told of his illness until it was all over.

Rumors about the Leverton, after a period of absence, began to grow again, but the crash, when it came, was still sudden and surprising. Coming back home, on a warm cloudy afternoon in August, John heard the shouts of Stephen and Lionel as they played cricket on the lawn, and he called up to Katharine through the echoing quietness of the house. From the landing she looked down the well of the stairs.

"I'm coming in a moment." As an afterthought she added, "I've heard the news."

When she joined him in the drawing room, he said, "Who told you?"

"Helen. She telephoned me. Grace telephoned me half an hour afterward."

"It's all over Manchester," he agreed. "But I didn't know it had reached the ladies."

"What's going to happen?"

He sat down, throwing his legs out. He was beginning to put on weight, and the physical relaxation was a relief.

"It's happened already," he said. "A bust."

"I meant, to Vicky."

"She's bankrupt. What else?"

"But she may not have put everything into the mill. Surely she will have kept something back. Like those shares you've bought in my name."

"It makes no difference if she has. The Leverton's a private company. Lye was going to incorporate after the war, but it was never done." He smiled grimly. "Wilf talked a lot about following Lye's plans, but he omitted the most important one. The result is that she is personally liable for all debts. And if there's any truth in what I've heard today, she'll be lucky if she can pay five shillings in the pound."

Katharine was silent for a moment. "What are they going to do?" she asked.

"We can't cover her debts, even if it would be a good idea."

"Can't Sickert's take over the mill? It's what you always wanted."

He said wearily, "We might. But there's an order out, and it's up to the receiver. And it won't do them any good if it does happen. The debt's well over the assets value."

In a new silence he heard Lionel's voice in the garden, pleading not out, bullying, cajoling Stephen and, when Stephen objected, threatening to end the game. If he behaved like that all the time, John reflected, what an abominable child he would be, but he spaced his tantrums out, and they were interlaced with charin.

"There must be a way we can help," Katharine said.

"Once it's all clear, we can make Vicky a personal loan. And I can probably fix Wilf up in Sickert's. That's if they will accept. Do you feel like going to see her?"

"At the funeral," Katharine said, "we barely spoke." She hesitated. "I don't feel like getting involved in a scene just now."

He was touched. "Would you like me to go?"

"Would you?"

"I might make things worse."

"Is that possible? Anyway, you can handle it better than I could. I think I'm getting a cold. My throat hurts."

"If I am to go, I think it's the sooner the better."

"Now?"

He nodded. "All right."

The maid showed him into the drawing room, and he noticed that nothing had been changed. This surprised him as much as had earlier the fact of Victoria staying on in that house after her second marriage. It had annoyed him, too, that she should have been willing to bring Wilf Maine into Lionel's home. But Wilf might never have been there. The room still had the stamp of Lionel's presence. There were the things he had brought from his parents' home—the ornate brass fender carved with cupids, the inlaid rosewood table on which he and John had played chess. On the wall he saw the decorated plate Lionel had bought at the St. Bernard hospice on a walking tour the year before their first visit together to La Jatte. He could remember the clouds pouring in a milky cataract over the white peaks of the surrounding mountains, the square black ugliness of the monastery buildings,

the horizontal icicles formed by the freezing wind that blew, without stopping, over the top of the pass.

Victoria got up to greet him. She was wearing a yellow dress with small black dots, which seemed to round out the natural slowness of her figure.

She said, "It's very good of you to come and see me, John. After all this time."

He said, "I was hoping to see Wilf too."

She shook her head, a gesture of resignation. "He won't be back till late, if at all. He may have to sleep at the mill. It's been like this for some weeks. I don't think I have to explain why."

"There's nothing he can do now."

It was not intended as a criticism, but he saw from her look that she took it so. She said, "Wilf knows best what he's doing."

He said quickly, "I'm not disputing that. I came to see if there was anything we could do to help."

She smiled slightly. "That's kind. I'll tell Wilf."

"You could come back with me," he suggested. "It's better for you not to be on your own."

"I don't want to come back with you, John." She paused. "There's nothing you can do, either. Please don't worry. We shall sort things out eventually."

She had put him out of his stride. He felt confused and awkward. He said, "Please listen to me, Vicky. You understand what it means, being bankrupted? All your assets, personal and otherwise, are included. This house as well."

She nodded. "Yes. I understand."

"After you and Wilf were married, was there any change?" She looked at him, puzzled. "In ownership?"

"No."

"Wilf remained your manager?"

"He preferred it that way."

"Then at least he's not liable. Any assets he may have cannot be touched."

She smiled. "They don't exist. Can you imagine Wilf with assets?"

"The motorcar, for instance."

"In my name."

He nodded, clicking his tongue. "That's comprehensive."

"Can I get you a drink?" Victoria asked. "Or isn't that allowed? The drinks are in my name, too."

"I'll have one, anyway."

"Brandy and soda?"

"I mostly drink Scotch now."

"Do you? Scotch, then." She poured a drink and brought it to him. "How is Kitty?" she asked.

"She's pretty well." He hesitated and then said, "She's pregnant again."

Victoria looked at him, smiling slightly. She had aged, he decided; one was conscious of it when the light was full on her face. She had never been as pretty as Katharine, and she had lost the vitality which she had once had.

"That's a coincidence," Victoria said.

"A coincidence?"

"I'm pregnant, too."

He thought she must be making some absurd and tasteless joke at first but she made a gesture, putting her hands down to her stomach, which convinced him.

He said, "But you were told you couldn't have another, after that first. Several doctors told Lye that. Whom have you found to say it's all right?"

"Doctors aren't infallible."

"Then you haven't taken fresh advice?"

She shook her head. "No."

As he gathered the implications, he stared at her in a new disbelief.

"You mean you're risking your life to give Wilf Maine a child, although you wouldn't do it for Lye?"

Her pale face slowly flushed. "Do you think that? Do you think it was I who wouldn't take the chance? I begged Lye to let me have a child again."

"And he refused?" John said. "And knowing that, Wilf is quite willing to let you now? Is that how much he thinks of Lye—how much you think?"

She said bitterly, "Not again! Lye's dead. Leave him in peace."

"Lye had no son. It was what he wanted most, and he never had it. Because of you. And yet you're ready to do that."

She began to make some reply, but stopped as the door opened. Wilf came in. His face showed fatigue; the jauntiness had gone out of his walk. He stared at John.

"What do want?" he asked.

His sullen tiredness, all the evidence of his defeat, restored John to magnanimity and allowed him to put his resentment at Victoria behind him.

He said, "I thought there might be something I could do to help."

"Did you, then? You've not done enough—is that it?"

The meaninglessness of his words probably derived from his exhaustion. John said, "I've not done anything yet. But I could do, perhaps."

"I wouldn't call it nothing," Wilf said. He went to the sideboard and poured himself a whisky. "I don't know if it's aught to be proud of, but bankrupting the Leverton is something, all right."

"You can't make me responsible for that."

"Can't I? I'm not saying you didn't have help. There's plenty like you in this town. All the little whippers in the right cars. 'Don't trust Maine. You'd better not give him credit.'"

"You got credit."

"No thanks to you; and look where I had to go to get it. And look where it's landed me. I suppose it wasn't you that persuaded Ashford's to cancel that contract for silasia?"

"No, it wasn't."

"But they took it to Sickert's, didn't they? I'm not supposed to know about that. I reckon."

"We didn't go after it. They came to us. It seems they'd heard things weren't going too well at the Leverton, and they didn't want to take a chance on not getting delivery. What did you expect our people to do—reassure them and send them back to you?"

"What, after going to the trouble of starting the rumors in the first place? No, I didn't expect that."

"To my knowledge, no one in Sickert's has started or encouraged

any rumors about the Leverton. Wilf, this is wasting our time. What's past is past; we have to think of what to do next."

Wilf drank his whisky quickly. "Any suggestions?"

"Let's be realistic. I take it you're going to lose the mill. Since it isn't a limited company, Vicky won't have anything left. I'd like to renew the offer I made to you to come into Sickert's. We can use your ability. I'm thinking in terms of a general works overseer, with technical responsibility for the whole group of mills. Well?"

"Go to hell. I wouldn't work for Sickert's again if I was starving."

"Sickert's have changed since the old days."

"I've heard as much. You're the boss now, aren't you?"

"No."

"As near as, damn it. You can make me general works overseer if you want to." He pronounced the title with a sneering precision. "Do you think I'd take anything from you? I'd as soon go and beg a job from Sir Matthew himself." He smiled crookedly. "Has your wife put you up to it? Has she begun to feel a bit guilty about persuading her father to leave everything to her and cut Vicky out? Is that why you're offering charity?"

"It's not charity." John turned to Victoria. "Your father's estate hasn't been touched. It's just as well you didn't get anything out of it before, because it would have gone like the rest. You can have the lot, as soon as the business of the Leverton is cleared up. Kitty would like you to have it. The only reason it was left to her was because she had the three children."

"What's that, if it isn't charity?" Wilf poured himself another drink and walked toward John with the glass in his hand. "You think I can't look after my own wife well enough? She is my wife, you know. You've never liked it, but there's naught you can do about it. Helping to ruin the Leverton doesn't do you any good. And offering her money to leave me won't do any good, either."

"No one's doing that," John said, "except in your imagination."

"When you cut off from seeing Vicky after she'd said she would marry me," Wilf asked, "was that my imagination? What reason have you lot ever given me for trusting you?"

"We trusted you about as much as you trusted us," John said.

"And we liked you as much, or as little. But why rake it all up

again?" Proud of his self-control, he looked at Victoria again. "There are no strings, Vicky. I hope you'll be willing to take it. It's rightfully yours."

Wilf put the glass down, spilling some of the whisky. He said, speaking to John but with his eyes on Victoria, "She goes over to your side if she takes it. But she isn't going to take it. She knows I'll look after her, without any help from you."

"And the child?"

"She told you that, did she?" He looked as though his anger might turn against Victoria, but instead it turned, as he watched her, to triumph. He smiled. "Yes, and the kid. We'll be all right, Mr. John Burchall."

John said quietly, "Why don't you let Vicky speak for herself, Wilf? Are you frightened of what she might say?"

"No!" He paused. "No, I'm not."

To Victoria, John said, "If Wilf won't come into Sickert's he won't, and that's that. But the money is something different. Let Kitty know as soon as the financial picture is a bit clearer and she'll give the necessary instructions to the solicitors."

Wilf stared at Victoria with so ridiculous a silent ferocity that John felt sure it would have the reverse of its intended effect. It was ludicrous that this unprepossessing little man should, after financially ruining his wife, expect to succeed with this kind of demand on her.

On an inspiration, he said, "Why not go out there, Vicky, while things are sorted out? The chalet is standing empty. It's your home, after all."

Wilf struggled with his desire to speak, and with a visible effort overcame it. There was a deeper conflict also, better hidden but showing its traces in the set lines of his face: a conflict between the overt attempt to dominate and a weakness, an imploring helplessness. Observing this, John was not surprised when Victoria shook her head.

She said, "My home is with Wilf. That's all I have to say."

He was not surprised, but he was angry. He felt his lips tightening.

"Your home's with him," he said. "He's taken what Lye left you and frittered it away. He's willing to let you have a child which Lye refused to allow, even when you were much younger, because of



the danger. And he won't permit you to take your own father's money so that you can look after the child and yourself. What kind of a home is he likely to get for you, now he's lost you this one?"

"Get out," Wilf said. He came up to John, as though ready to attack him physically. "Get back to your dirty little schemes and swindles, and the women you pick up in Lime Street on your trips to Liverpool—yes, I know a few things about you. Get out of my way, and Vicky's, and stay out. Last time it was you as told Vicky she wouldn't see you after she married me. This time we're the ones who are serving notice. We don't want aught to do with you, now or in the future. We don't want your money nor your help, and, by God, we certainly don't want your company. Now, get out, before I kick you out."

John was almost angry enough to take him on; even out of condition as he was there would not be much difficulty in handling such as Wilf, and there would be a good deal of satisfaction in humiliating him physically, here in the room where every item was a reminder of Lionel. But the news might get out, and it wouldn't do to have it talked about in King Street. He had his own position to consider.

He simply said, "Goodbye, Vicky," and walked out.

Katharine's resurgent concern for Victoria was short-lived; it did not survive John's account of his interview with her and Wilf. She was angry on his account and blamed herself for his having been exposed to it. When John said that it was Wilf who had done the talking, that Victoria had said little, she was not mollified.

"She has the child to think of," John pointed out.

Katharine turned away. "I don't want to talk about the child. Doesn't that make it worse? Are the boys to have a child of Wilf Maine's as a cousin?"

"I don't understand *why*."

"I don't want to talk about it," Katharine repeated. She moved her head slowly. "My head aches. I don't want to talk about them at all. I only hope they go away somewhere. I don't want to see them or hear of them."

From time to time, of course, they did hear things. There was the examination in bankruptcy, which was reported in the press.

There was the sale by auction of the house and contents. There were the accounts which reached John of Wilf's attempts to secure a position with another company. These were normally accompanied by the damning observation that no one wanted the man. He carried the reputation of having ruined a promising mill, and of having grown too big for his boots. In addition, his personality told against him. Any employer who might have been inclined to sympathize only had to listen to him stating his grievances—which he did at every interview to which he was called—for the inclination to be effectively subdued. Sympathy, in any case, was not widespread. Most people in the industry had known and disliked him for long enough.

After, on his showing her the notice of the auction, Katharine had simply turned away in silence, John did not pass on any other item of news, until the last one. Then he said simply, "I hear Vicky's got a boy—last Wednesday."

"Is she all right?"

"I'm told they both are. They're leaving Manchester soon. He's got some kind of job in a factory down south, and they're going down there to live."

"Far?"

"South of London."

"That's all right, then," she said. "Do we need two garages—and such a size, too?"

They were choosing a new house. With the hard onset of winter, Sir Matthew had given in at last and retreated, on his doctor's advice, to the south of France. John had been confirmed as chairman of the board. Simultaneously Sir Matthew had made over to him a substantial part of his holdings in the company. He had said grimly, "You don't need to thank me, John. It's a kind of incentive, for my own benefit. I'm not ready to die yet, and it'll help me to keep alive for five years to make sure they don't get any of that in duties. I've given enough to the Government, for what they've done for cotton."

"We shall miss you."

Sir Matthew shook his head, denying this. "The young ones don't miss the old. It's only true the other way round. You'll find how true that is one day."

The house to which John had brought Katharine lay in the flat Cheshire countryside, some fifteen miles from the city. It was of early Victorian construction, a square gray unremarkable building, and stood in five or six acres of ground, mostly parkland. It had been built by the son of one of Nelson's captains, who had made a fair-sized fortune by investing his father's prize money in canals; it had taken over eighty years for his descendants to run it down to the point where it had become necessary to part with the house.

"I think it's really rather large for us," Katharine said. "Ten principal bedrooms. Half the place will be standing empty all the time."

"We shall have to entertain more."

"Sir Matthew didn't."

"It was different for him. And the times are different, too."

She said, "I'm not sure I'm going to be very good at that sort of thing."

He opened the door of the library and made way for her to enter. She walked in and stood on the thick green carpet looking around her. She always retained a grace of carriage right to the end of her pregnancies, and even this time, when she was so much bigger, made no difference. John looked with pleasure at the rich curve of her body.

"I don't agree," he said. "I'm sure you're going to be very good at it."

She made a face of deprecation and dissent. Nothing troubled her much at the moment. She was enriched and happy.

"All the books," she commented. "Are any of them particularly valuable?"

"No. A few were, but they sold them during the war."

"Would they sell without the furniture?"

"They would, I think. But it's better for them this way. And better for us. You can't be expected to furnish a new house this year."

"Ten bedrooms," she said, "not counting the servants' and the nursery wing. I'm going to have my hands full."

"With a good cook-housekeeper, things shouldn't be too difficult."

She shook her head. "I can't imagine living here."

"In a year or two you won't be able to imagine living anywhere else."

He walked to the window, and she followed him. The library looked to the rear of the house. A lawn ran down to a sunken garden, with a meadow beyond, lightly veiled by hawthorns.

"We could have a tennis court built down there, I think," he suggested. "In the field."

Katharine smiled. "We're getting too old for tennis."

"Not yet. I need the exercise. And the children are almost big enough to want to play."

"We must have a sand garden for the children."

"They're too big for that! Even Lionel."

"The twins won't be."

"There's no urgency as far as they're concerned. Nanny would never let any of them play in the sand until they were over two." He pressed her arm slightly. "They aren't here yet."

She sighed. "Not long now."

"Let us move in first."

"Do you really want to take the place and move in so quickly?"

He turned back to the room, to the quiet luxury, the bound volumes of *The Gentleman's Magazine*, *The Spectator*, *Punch*, *The Illustrated London News*.

"Yes," he said. "I think we might as well."

"The twins will be born in splendid surroundings."

"No better than they deserve."

Katharine ran her hands over the dark leather back of one of the deep club chairs.

"I do hope we have a girl this time," she said.

"They can both be girls," John said. "Three sons are enough." He rested his hands on her shoulders. "I leave it to you to arrange."

Katharine's confinement took place at Aboukir House on a Sunday in the cold fog end of February. Nanny Kilter, as she had done at the two previous births, took charge of operations, moving her effects into Katharine's dressing room and issuing her clipped Scotch commands to servants, midwife and, once she had gauged his tolerance, even to the doctor. Lionel was abandoned—

completely so, since his elder brothers were both away at school. John found him sitting, forlorn and quiet, on the second flight of stairs.

"Well," he said, "you look lost. Has everyone abandoned you?"

Lionel nodded. "I think so, Daddy."

"Did you get any breakfast?"

"Phyllis brought me some. But the egg wasn't the way I like it, and she wouldn't ask Cook to change it. She said they were all too busy."

"So they are," John said. "All except us. Shall we go and explore outside? We might find some mint sweets on the way."

"Before dinner?"

"If Nanny's left you I should think she's taken her rules with her for today. Don't you think so?"

Lionel got up quickly. "Yes, I do. That's a very good idea."

They walked together along the gravel path between the stretches of lawn. The surface scrunched damply under their feet, the heavier and the lighter tread, and all other sounds were from far away, diminished by the mist, which did not hide surrounding objects but merely took their color from them.

"Tell me," John asked, "do you like it here, in the new house?"

"I think so," Lionel said. "I probably do."

"You will be able to show Richard and Stephen where everything is when they come back from school."

Lionel nodded more enthusiastically. "How long is it before they do come back, Daddy?"

"I'm not sure. A few weeks still. Do you miss them?"

"You can't play *properly* by yourself."

"Well, you will be going to school with them after Easter."

They came to the garden. There were steps leading down to it, and on either side a stone wall, some four feet high. Small fruit trees, now bare of leaves, had been trained to run along it. Lionel jumped down from the steps and crouched, peering over the wall.

"We can play trenches here," he said. "I shall show them that."

John smiled. "Do you still play trenches?"

"It's the best game. Will there be a war when we are grown up?"

"I shouldn't think so."

"I hope there is."

"War isn't a game. People get killed."

"Not if they're very clever, surely?"

John was amused, as always, by the adult turn of his speech. He said, "I'm afraid so. Even when they're very clever."

"Well, you didn't, Daddy."

"I wasn't in the trenches. I was a long way from the front line."

"It wasn't much fun, though, was it?"

"Being in the trenches wasn't fun, either."

"I should think it was." Lionel found a piece of stick and poked it, rifle fashion, over the wall. "I should think it was remarkable fun."

"Like eating mint sweets before dinner?"

"No." He looked troubled suddenly, his face assuming a familiar, slightly sulky look. "You're making jokes, Daddy."

"Not really. Will you have another? I'll have one, too." John gave a sweet to Lionel and put one in his own mouth. "You see, in the trenches it wasn't just the risk of being killed yourself. You had to kill other people too. That was your job."

"But they were Germans."

Looking toward the house, John saw a small figure appear: Nanny Kilter. She began to walk toward them along the path.

"It hurts people just as much," he said, "whether they're English or German, when they're left lying badly wounded, with no one to take care of them or help them."

"But when people are wounded, they have bandages on and they're put into bed. I've seen pictures of them."

He was looking at Nanny Kilter, not the boy. He said, "Not always. And sometimes not for a long time."

Lionel scrambled up onto the steps again. He said, "They have to just lie there, with it hurting?" Looking down, John saw the small face troubled again, but differently now—contorted by the apprehension of pain and suffering in another. "Is that really what happens?"

He was too young for it. Callousness and innocence stamped the same coin; that was something one forgot. Too young and at the same time too apt for the pains of growing. The other two would not have bridged that gulf.

"It doesn't happen any more," John said, "and it won't again."

Come on, laddy. I think Nanny wants us. I think the baby twins may have come. Have you decided which kind you want yet?"

Lionel said, in a distant voice, "I don't know."

They met Nanny Kilter halfway to the house. Her face showed no more now than it ever did.

"Any news?" John asked.

"It's over," she said. "They're well enough. You'd better go up right away."

"What are they?"

"A boy and a girl." She turned away, taking hold of Lionel almost fiercely. "I'll see to Master Lionel."

She moved away quickly with the boy, giving him no chance to ask further questions. He was a little disquieted, but not unduly worried; there was a store of temperament beneath Nanny's granite surface, and she was often strange. But he knew there was something wrong when Dr. Greene met him at the top of the stairs. Greene was a man given to explosive good humor on appropriate occasions, and this should have been one. He blinked through his spectacles and beckoned toward the dressing room.

"In here."

The door connecting with Katharine's room was closed, and Greene shut the outer door behind John as he entered. The two cots stood side by side, as they had been made ready, between the windows. John went across and stood by them, looking at his children.

He was conscious at first only of the ordinary ugliness of a newborn child—the redness, the pinched simian face. It took a little time for him to realize that there was something else, that the crookedness of the exposed leg was a crookedness of bone which time would not iron out, that one foot was drawn up like a fist, that in almost every line of the small body there was distortion, as though a print had been smudged by some vindictive hand. He looked at the other baby, and then at Greene.

In a dry voice, he asked, "Which is the girl?"

Greene pointed. "On the left."

"The uglier, if there's anything to choose."

"They've had a hard journey," Greene said. "I thought they might not live. Their chances are still not too good."

"Aren't they?"

Their eyes met and then broke away again.

"They'll need very careful nursing," Greene said.

"Not from Nanny." He spoke involuntarily, remembering and understanding her look. More slowly, he said, "Can anything be done about—this?"

"No."

"Surgery, of some kind?"

"No. If they survive, I think they'll be able to walk. At this stage, one can't be certain."

"And without the very careful nursing?"

Greene shrugged. He said carefully, "I must tell you, Mr. Burchall, that it would not surprise me to find either or both dead on my next visit. It could happen quite naturally."

All had been said that was needed. They understood their roles. Greene had accepted his; the other was left to John, to accept or reject at will.

"At least you have three healthy boys already," Greene said. "It's a consolation."

"Yes." John stared at the two small deformed bodies. Neither was crying. They lay and gazed upward like transients who watched an incomprehensible scene for a moment before a curtain came down. The boy's eyes, he saw, were not level. He steeled his purpose.

"How is my wife?" he asked. "That's the important thing."

"Fairly good. You can go in and see her."

"Does she know?" Greene shook his head. "Can she be told?"

"She has had babies before. She knows she is well enough to see them. I think you will have to tell her."

John knocked on the bedroom door and went in. The midwife, who had been arranging the bed, looked at him with sharp eyes and, with a word or two of inarticulate explanation, left the room. John went to the bed and sat down beside Katharine. She had a wide-eyed serenity, a smiling calm. He bent and kissed her.

"They've come at last," she said. "A boy and a girl, Nanny tells me. Where is Nanny?"

"She's looking after Lionel."



"Poor little Lionel. He must feel lost. I thought she must be with the babies. Can I see them now?"

"Before you do . . ." he said.

He could not find words. He saw the lines of anxiety creasing her face, and there was nothing he could do to ease them.

"They're not . . ." Her voice steadied. "Is one of them dead?"

"They're both alive."

"Then . . . Tell me."

He became aware that the mint sweet was still in his mouth, a cloying reminder of childhood, of the simplicities of appetite and need. He wondered, if they lived, would they be idiots as well? Something else, probably, that Greene could not be certain of.

"You must tell me," Katharine said.

"They're crippled," he said.

"Both of them?"

"Yes."

She stared in silence for a moment. "I want to see them," she said finally.

"It might be better to wait for a time."

"Now," she insisted. "No waiting."

John looked at her and nodded. "If you wish." He went to the dressing room and told the midwife. The cots were on wheels; they each pushed one through into Katharine's room, lifting them carefully for the ridge in the doorway and the edges of the carpets. The cots were put side by side against Katharine's bed. She raised herself up to look at them.

Conscious of a harshness in his voice, John said, "They are both weak. Greene thinks they may not live."

He was looking at her, but she did not return his look. Her gaze was concentrated on the two small figures in their cots. The expression on her face was one he had never seen before: despairing, hungry, fierce.

"Give them to me," she said to the midwife. It was only when she was holding them, side by side, against her breast, that she turned to John again.

"They will live," she said. She looked at him, as though reading and defying his intention. "Whatever Greene says, they'll live."

## 5

THEIR MARRIAGE died on that look, although the break between them was never made definite and it was nearly a year before Katharine left Aboukir House. The day after the three boys had returned to school following the Christmas holidays, she came to him in the evening carrying a letter which she had written. Ordinarily they kept their correspondences separate and private.

Katharine said, "I've been writing to Jeanette."

It took him a moment or two to realize whom she meant. He nodded.

"Yes."

"To ask her to open up the chalet."

"I see. I didn't know you were going over this year—before summer, anyway."

He saw that she understood his meaning; with Lionel at school now, there was less justification for making the trip to Switzerland.

She said, "I want to take Joe and Jane away."

"For the winter sports?"

Although the remark, like many nowadays, was designed to provoke her, he was ashamed of the cheapness of the irony. And like the previous attempts, it failed of its mark.

She said calmly, "I think it will be better for them out there. They have both had colds all winter."

He said, with distaste, "I know. How long are you planning to stay at La Jatte?"

"I'm not sure." She hesitated and then went on, as though speaking to someone who had a right to hear a slightly awkward truth. "I think it may be better to keep them out there."

"You mean for good?"

"Yes."

His tone became as polite and formal as her own. "Why do you think that?"

"Partly for reasons of health. They are never going to be strong."

"And the other reasons?"

"I think it might be better for you to have them out of your way. We don't need to pretend about that, do we?"

"I am to be deprived of my wife as well?"

"There's no alternative."

"They could be sent to the kind of place where they would get proper treatment—and care."

She dismissed this instantly. "They're my children. I will look after them."

"You have other children. You've not forgotten that?"

"They're at school," she said patiently. "I only see them during holidays as it is. They can come out to Switzerland."

"No!" She looked up at him. "I have some natural rights. This is their home, and I want them to come here from school."

There was a pause. She said, "We mustn't fight each other. We can't afford to." Her gaze was direct, insisting, not pleading. "We can compromise. A part of the time here, part at La Jatte with me."

He realized with this that she was serious. He asked, feeling horror as he put the question, "If you had to choose between the boys and—those two, which would it be?"

"You know." Her face drew into lines of pain. "Why ask, when you know?"

"Did you ever love the others?" he asked. "I don't see how you could have done."

"You don't know what love is, John. You never have done. You want everything to be easy."

"And you—what do you want?"

"Joe and Jane are mine. No one, nothing else, has been mine in the same way. I knew that when I saw your face the day they were born, and again when Nanny said she was leaving. These two are mine. I have them, and they need me."

"Is that all?"

"Yes, all."

He began to pace the room. "Be reasonable, Kitty. You owe something to the other children too."

"And you," she said, "to these."

"This is a large enough house. We can live together. I promise you I will make no complaints."

"And keep them out of the way when you have visitors—hide them in the nursery wing? All during Christmas I watched you keeping the boys from them, as though they were lepers. It's not good enough."

"You can't expect the healthy not to turn from the sick and crippled. It needs no urging."

"It's not true. But your thinking it true is my main reason for taking them away from here."

"They will still turn from them, at La Jatte!"

"I don't think so. And La Jatte will be the twins' home. The boys will be visitors."

"If they come."

"Let them choose. A month in the summer, a fortnight at Easter, Christmas in alternate years—if they wish it."

"And if they don't?"

"They will be in good hands. I know you're very proud of them."

He did not try to answer the jibe. He did not want to provoke her; her coldness and determination unnerved him.

"We'll see how things go," he said reluctantly.

"Yes." She ran her tongue along the flap of the letter and sealed it. "That's the only thing to do."

The new arrangement worked better than he had expected. He was pleased with the realization that it enabled him to secure certain advantages which Katharine did not challenge. When the boys spent Christmas at La Jatte he went out with them, and in

the alternate years he had them to himself at Aboukir House. The fortnight at Easter was rarely more than a week, against the competition of his own schemes for them, and sometimes they did not go out at all. The month in summer became a regular custom, but there again John developed the habit of joining them at La Jatte for a large part of it. When he was not there they stayed with their mother in the little chalet, but when he came to stay at the Édouard they spent a good deal of their time with him, sometimes sleeping in his suite at the hotel. Katharine accepted these small encroachments. As the years passed he thought that she became more distant in her manner, even with the twins.

At home he found a good housekeeper, a Mrs. Johnstone, who ran his domestic affairs with a courteous and impersonal efficiency. After an interregnum in which he felt unsettled, he found himself relishing the freedom afforded by his new way of life. This was particularly the case in sexual matters. He had many years ago put an end to his brief liaisons with local girls employed by the company, thinking them injudicious, and had instead made forays to Liverpool—in the first place to prostitutes and later to mistresses kept in a flat he had taken in that city. He was never absolutely sure that Katharine might not get wind of this, and it was the fear that perhaps she did know, and could have produced evidence if she chose to sue for divorce, that had helped to subdue his reaction to her announcement that she was going to live in La Jatte. Once she had gone, he was free of this, and free of the need to make excuses for his absences. Not long afterward he found it possible to put this side of his life on a more permanent and satisfying basis when he met a girl called Peggy Brean and, after paying off the current occupant, installed her a week later in the flat in Riverdale Mansions.

When he met her she was playing in the chorus of a company on tour; he got her name from the doorkeeper and sent her flowers the first evening and an invitation to supper on the second. Talking to her in the restaurant, he knew what she could mean to him, with the instant unwavering conviction that he sometimes felt at a crucial point in the negotiation of a business contract. She was only eighteen, but looked older. Under the carefully applied cosmetics, he guessed that she had little natural color; her

hands, arms and neck were very white and slender. But he thought she would be passionate, and he was sure she would be practical. She came from Scotland, had a faint pleasant trace of the Lowland burr and had cut herself off, she revealed, from an unsatisfactory family.

The relationship did not disappoint him. He was conscious that she too was content in it, and eager to establish its permanency; their co-operation in this was somehow more meaningful than had been his co-operation with Katharine in the early days of their marriage. She was not extravagant, and she was discreet. When they went out together, it was on her insistence that they met in London, and although she wore jewelry he bought for her, and wore it well, she contrived to make it clear, without giving offense, that she did not expect such gifts—indeed, except on special occasions, did not welcome them.

At first, in recollection of other women with whom he had been associated, he regarded his friendly separation from Katharine as a useful defense; there could be no question of marriage and he made it clear that in any case he loathed the idea of divorce, for the damage it might do to his children. Peggy accepted this, obviously without reservations, and although there was never any question of allowing her to impinge physically on the other, more important sectors of his life, in due course he carried those sectors to her, discussing both the boys and his business affairs with her and paying attention to her advice.

With this, their physical life together was also satisfactory. She progressed from a surprising modesty and emotional awkwardness to a depth and gladness of response that could only be genuine, and he for his part felt with her a security, a freedom, that was new and continually renewed. Although she was so much younger—less than half his age—it was not from her youth that he drew vigor and delight, but from her comparative maturity, and from her undemonstrative, undemanding warmth. He came to regard her as a contemporary, raising her to his age rather than trying to stoop down to hers.

Altogether these were good years, years of progress as well as pleasure, a time of consolidation and of looking forward. In the cotton trade as a whole there were difficulties, and Sickert's was

not spared these, but Sickert's did better than most of their competitors, and within Sickert's his control was unchallenged and supreme. Wainwright, a year or two after Sir Matthew's retirement, turned to politics, and in the second 1924 election secured a safe Tory seat and junior office in the new administration. He remained on the board, John's man without qualification, alert for any challenge to his authority. There was no challenge, however. By the time Sir Matthew died, with the cold January sunshine streaming through the window of his flat in Cannes, John's position was as strong as the old man's had been. Sickert's was effectively his, to do with as he liked.

Even the onset of the industrial slump at the end of the decade did not unduly trouble him. He had anticipated its coming, was not surprised at either its severity or its duration, and laid his plans for its eventual end. Mills were closed down or put on half time, Sickert mills among them, but Sickert's had the reserves to see through the lean years, and money counted now in a way it had not during the ebullient Twenties. There were bargains to be picked up by a man with cash in the bank and faith in the future. In the spring of 1932, among other things, John negotiated the purchase by Sickert's of the Leverton mill.

It was a week later—the coincidence amused and interested him—that he had a letter from Katharine, mentioning Stanley Maine. She wrote:

I had a letter, three weeks ago, from Vicky's boy, Stanley. He wrote to tell me that Vicky is dead—she died soon after Christmas. It was a polite letter, well written for a boy of that age, with some rather odd, involved turns of phrase. He said he knew I was living at La Jatte because there had been something about you and me in some newspaper or journal, and that he felt I might wish to know of my sister's demise—that's the way he put it. He wrote from an address in Shoonbridge, which as far as I know is a dreary little industrial town in Surrey. The news was a great shock, of course. Out here I have time to reflect on a lot of things, and I have thought of Vicky from time to time, and wondered about her, and her reasons for doing as she did—*les raisons du cœur*, no doubt, but I thought

I knew her heart. One learns how little one knows as one grows older. If I had known her address, I think I would have written to her; but I knew she could always reach me if she wished, either through Sickert's or here at La Jatte, and I thought someday she would, and perhaps visit, and we could sit like old wives together. She was only forty-one when she died.

I wrote back to the boy, of course. He had made no mention of his father, but I presume Wilf is still alive. So I wrote as delicately as possible, with that in view, and said how much I would like to see him but that I now lived the year round in Switzerland, for the health of my youngest children. I said I hoped it would be possible for him to be my guest here for a few weeks, perhaps during the summer holidays, and told him that if he agreed I would arrange to send him tickets and traveling money—the usual arrangements, I said, that I made for my own elder boys.

I have had no reply to my letter. It occurs to me that this may be due to Wilf's influence, and while he has every right to keep his boy from us, I find myself worrying about him. Surely he should have been permitted to send me a polite refusal, having written to me in the first place? I know it is asking a great deal, but I wonder if you could arrange to discover something about their conditions—there are agencies that do this sort of thing, I understand—to put my mind at rest? I feel that I owe this to Vicky. There might be some way in which one could help, if help were needed. The address is 178 Ashfield Road, Shoonbridge. Rather pathetically, the house is called "The Chalet."

At first John considered getting his secretary to arrange for the routine inquiry Katharine had requested, but, with a preliminary report on the Leverton mill lying in his in-tray, he was reluctant to dispose of it so casually. The following Saturday he had a business appointment in London, which was to be combined with a weekend for which Peggy would join him. He could include a visit to Shoonbridge as well; the economy of this pleased him.

On the Monday afternoon, therefore, he saw Peggy to her train at Euston and then took a cab to Waterloo and to the train for Shoonbridge. He arrived soon after half past four. The station was a drab, dirty place, and so, despite a bright veneer of sunlight, was the station square. The buildings, even the bank and the public



house, were tiny cramped affairs, and they needed paint. There was one taxi, to which the same terms applied.

It was a working-class town, but of much later origin than the Lancashire mill towns John was used to, dating only from the turn of the century. It had been planned. Roads were crosshatched on it, enclosing parallel rows of terraced cottages. The streets looked slightly cleaner than they would have done in a northern town, the houses themselves dirtier and more unkempt. The effect was drab rather than gloomy.

Ashfield Road was a rectangular projection from the main thoroughfare, and No. 178 was in the middle of the fourth block. This block differed from those surrounding it. It was made up of small new semidetached houses in place of the Victorian terraces, and it faced open ground. When he had paid off the taxi, John walked up a tiny path to the front door. The name, "The Chalet," was handpainted in uneven lettering on a piece of board suspended by chains above the porch. He pressed the bell button and heard it buzz inside. But there was no reply.

He did not ring again; the house had a silence that confirmed its emptiness. He looked at his watch and saw that it was only a quarter to five. Presumably Wilf would be at work still. And the boy at school, or being given tea by neighbors.

He walked out to the road again, noticing as he did the odd, amateurish ornateness of the small front garden. Crazy paving, made of broken cement pieces, was laid in four paths leading from a center marked by a misshapen concrete birdbath on a thick pedestal. Pieces of broken china had been set in round the sides. Between the paths plants were set in an untidy profusion, with standard rose trees rising out of them. There was too much of everything for the size of the garden, and even so early in the year it had a wild look. On the rose nearest the gate a thick briar shoot had sprung up from the base.

John paced his way around two or three of the neighboring blocks. A corner house had a wooden sign that said "Gospel Tabernacle," and the blank wall facing the street had been boarded and the boards lettered: "PREPARE TO MEET HIM WHO LOVES YOU AND PUNISHES THE SINNER!" The houses were mean, even more wretched than they had seemed from the windows of

the taxi. Incredulously he thought, Vicky, living here, dying here. Surely it could not be true. And for what? Love of Wilf Maine? Pride? She had only to write to be set free.

On the way back he paused for a while by the patch of open ground; at one time a football pitch had been marked out there, and the goalposts remained, one of them leaning perilously backward at one corner. There was a little scrub grass, but mostly packed earth. A gang of boys were playing a match with a worn football. Their ages ranged from seven or eight to the early teens. One of the bigger ones caught his eye; he alone had football kit—navy shorts, a red-and-blue quartered shirt and bright new football boots. Apparently he was the captain of one side. He was fair-haired, lumpy rather than muscular, and had pale, slightly chubby cheeks. He played with enthusiasm, but more dramatically than skillfully. To begin with, he made a solo run through his opponents and scored a goal. When, shortly afterward, they equalized, he took out the little boy who had been in goal and replaced him by the only other on his side of his own age group. The enemy swept through and scored again, at which, turning apparently to thoughts of heroic defense, he took goal himself. The new move was as profitless as the other had been; his demoralized side were overrun and a third goal was scored over his prostrate body. Clearly the latest arrangement was the worst possible one, but the fair boy kept to it while the others scored goal after goal. A boy, John decided, with imagination and vanity and a deficiency in common sense.

There were more people in the streets, cycling or walking home from the light engineering factory on which, to a considerable extent, Shoonbridge depended. He turned from the players and looked toward the house. A man got off an old black bicycle and pushed the machine through the gate. It was Wilf Maine. He left the bicycle leaning against the fence that divided the front gardens of No. 178 and No. 180 and let himself into the house.

A minute or two later he opened the door to John's ring. Recognition was immediate, and he showed no surprise.

He said, "Burchall. What do you want?"

"I wondered if I could have a chat with you, about your boy chiefly. Can I come in?"

He did not reply at once. There were two impulses, John recognized; one would be to have the satisfaction of closing the door in his face, the other to enjoy the dismissal at greater leisure. The second won.

"You can come in if you want to," Wilf said. "The boy's out."

He turned his back and led the way through the narrow hall, plucking off bicycle clips on the way. The doors opening off were of cheap wood, with imitation graining. One of them was open, showing a scullery barely wider than the hall, from which came a mixed smell of gas and rancid fats. A tap dripped over the sink.

Wilf took him into one of the rooms. It had a large table which took up so much of the limited space that it was necessary to sidle round it. Rexine-covered armchairs stood on either side of a fireplace surrounded by tiles in unpleasant pastel shades. There were cold ashes in the grate.

"You'd better sit down," Wilf said. "There's no fire. Me and the boy are both out all day. We only light one in the evenings."

"It's a warm day," John said.

The arm of the chair was almost touching the table top. The room's effect was claustrophobic. A heavy Welsh dresser occupied practically the whole of one wall, and a bulging sofa, to match the armchairs, was pressed between another wall and the table. Nowhere was there more than three feet of clearance. The walls were hung with Victorian pictures in gilt frames, and facing the fireplace, between Bubbles and a scene of dogs chasing a rat inside a stable, hung the plate from the St. Bernard hospice.

"Will you have a cigarette?" Wilf said. He fished out from his pocket a battered tin. "I roll my own."

"Thank you." The cigarette John took was loosely packed, trailing fragments of tobacco. He accepted a light from an obviously homemade lighter. "Did you make that yourself, too?"

Wilf looked at the lighter and dropped it into his pocket.

"Yes. On company time, as well." He spoke with a mixture of bravado and derision.

John said, "I've heard about Vicky. We're very sorry. I wish we had known earlier."

"What would you've done—sent her a jar of calf's foot jelly? No one could do aught for her."

Wilf spoke in the same flat Lancashire accent. Physically the greatest difference appeared to be that he had begun to stoop. His eyes were a little more sunken and his face more deeply grooved with wrinkles, but they were the same wrinkles. Yet, studying it, John saw that his face was changed. That which had been stubbornness in it had been sharpened, by time and the bruising of defeat, to the harder, keener, more brittle edge of fanaticism. Even if he had been willing to accept it, this was not a man who could be brought back into a position of responsibility in his old industry. Nor was it likely that he would be willing, in any case.

"I'm sorry," John said. He paused. "We learned through a letter Kitty had—from your boy, Stanley."

Wilf nodded noncommittally. "So I believe."

"She wrote back to him. She suggested he might go and stay with her in Switzerland for a few weeks in the summer."

"Yes."

"When he didn't reply, she asked me to look you up, to see if I could persuade you to it."

Wilf laughed. "You thought Stanley had written behind my back, and that I'd found out what was going on and put a stop to it? That's not the way things are between Stan and me. He didn't tell me when he wrote, but he told me after, before your wife wrote back to him. We talk everything over together. In all his life I've only had to beat him once. That was when he was three. He defied me, and I leathered him till he was raw. It's never been needed since. I don't even have to check him."

"I'm glad to hear it. Kitty thought from his letter he sounded a fine lad. Will he accept her invitation?"

Wilf looked up. "No." He smiled, savoring the moment. "He has his pride, as much as I have. He doesn't want any charity from the Burchalls, either."

"What charity is there in having a boy as a guest? He would be a companion for our twins."

"Paying his fare to Switzerland and offering him pocket money. That's charity to us."

So far John had been indifferent as to whether the invitation were accepted or not. He had come here out of curiosity and an

obscure interest in his unknown nephew, but prepared for refusal and prepared to regard the episode as unimportant. Now, however, he felt something of his old irritation with Wilf, and the beginning of a determination to defeat him in this.

He said calmly, "I don't see it. And from the boy's point of view, surely a holiday in Switzerland can only be a good thing? At that age, to have his mother die—it's bound to be a great shock. A few weeks in the Alps might help him a lot."

"The boy's all right. I can look after him."

"I think Vicky would have liked it for him."

"Just leave Vicky out of it! You none of you gave a damn about her."

The violence of the reaction showed that he had been touched.

John said, "But she would have liked it, wouldn't she? She loved the place."

"Aye, and her father cut her off when she married me!"

"Only because he thought she was well enough provided for. You know that. And you can't hold that against the place. That was her home when she was your boy's age. I can't believe she wouldn't have wanted him to visit it."

"Stan makes his own mind up," Wilf said loudly. "He decides what he wants to do. He—"

He broke off at the sound of a door opening in the house. His eyes tightened.

"That'll be Stan," he said. "He'll be home for his tea." He paused. "I don't reckon you'll want to be staying long. We have to see to our own meals."

When the living-room door opened, it was the boy who had attracted John's attention in the scratch football game who came in. He was still in football clothes. He said, "Hello, Dad," and stood looking at the two men, his face blank. John remembered the flamboyancy of his tactics on the field. It will be easy, he thought—he only needs playing.

"This is your uncle," Wilf said. He laughed. "Your mysterious uncle. He's come to ask you about going to Switzerland again."

"I'm on my dad's side," the boy said. "When I wrote I wasn't asking for anything."

His voice was a boy's clear treble, but had more warmth than was usual. He spoke with marked defiance.

"It isn't a matter of sides, Stanley," John said. "Your father and I have been talking things over. He tells me he wants you to make the decision yourself."

"I said he had made it himself," Wilf said. "He doesn't want to go. There's no more to be said."

"But if he changed his mind," John suggested, "you wouldn't raise objections?"

"No. If he did change his mind."

There was uneasiness under the dogmatic surface. John saw that Wilf had wanted him to stay there till the boy came back, had wanted him to see the closeness existing between them. He was proud of his son. But because of that, he would feel obliged to demonstrate openly his fairness, and his concern for the boy's interests.

The boy said, "There's no reason I should change my mind once I've said something."

"Not unless you learn something new," John said. He turned to Wilf. "I know you want him to choose for himself. For your own part, I'm sure you would be glad for him to have a holiday in the Alps as long as he thought it was the right thing to do himself."

Wilf looked at his son. "If he thought so."

"You know all the advantages there would be for him. It would help his French, as well. That was a grammar school cap I saw in the hall, wasn't it?"

"Yes," Wilf said. "Lynstoke Grammar." He paused. "He's going to Lynstoke because he got especially good marks in the scholarship exam."

Still taking an old cue, the boy said, "We don't want any charity." He spoke hotly and his voice cracked slightly. His manners were bad, John thought, but no more than one would expect, considering who his father was. And he was speaking too emphatically, blotting out a too attractive prospect. "Dad and I are all right on our own."

"That's what I told you, Burchall," Wilf said.

John said to the boy, "No one's offering charity. My wife's asking a favor."

"You've always been against Dad and Mum."

"That's a long story. For the moment, let's assume that you're right. These things happen, quarrels in families, but the people who quarrel are still related. Your aunt and your mother were sisters. Their own mother died when they were very small, and so they were very close to each other. Your aunt was very touched when she got your letter; it was the first time she had known where your father and mother had gone to live. She wants to see you, because you are Vicky's son—her only nephew. I think you are the kind of boy who can understand that. Can't you?"

The boy looked at him. He wanted, John was sure, to be won over, but he was intelligent and sensitive enough to insist on a clinching argument. He said nothing now.

"And I believe your mother would have wanted you to accept. She loved La Jatte." He saw from a flicker of the boy's face that something had gone home. "Perhaps that's why she called this house 'The Chalet' To remind her of Chalet Fanshawe."

"We picked the name," the boy said. "Dad and I. We got things ready while she was in hospital."

"To please her?" The boy mastered his emotion. "Did she talk much of Switzerland to you?"

"At times," the boy said.

"And don't you think she would like to have thought of you going out there, to see it all?"

"Not taking charity."

"But it isn't charity. Your aunt wants you there. You will be doing the favor to her."

Wilf got up from his chair. He went to the boy and stood beside him, putting an arm over his shoulders.

"If she wants to see the boy," he said, "why doesn't she come here and see him, the way you've done? Or is she a bit too high and mighty for a place like this?"

John saw the shadow of disappointment on the boy's face, as he accepted this argument. He said now, quietly, but with the same confidence he had felt, dozens of times, in a board room, "She can't, Wilf. Perhaps you didn't know. Our children, the

twins, are cripples. That's why she lives in Switzerland all the year. And more than anything else, that's why it would be doing her—doing us—a favor if Stanley were to accept her invitation. They're his age, but they have no playmates but each other. She said they were so pleased when she said their cousin might be coming from England to stay with them for a while. She will hate it if she has to disappoint them now."

He looked at the two of them, standing together. Wilf's eyes had more confusion than suspicion; in the boy's there was understanding and relief. This was something that could justify a change of mind, with no question of betrayal.

"The charity will be yours," John said. "We will be very glad to accept it."

That summer the elder boys, as they had done the previous two summers, stayed at the Chalet des Gentianes, but John took his usual suite at the Édouard. The hotel had a desolate half-empty look, and, walking up through the village on a warm overcast morning, he saw other signs of the absence of holiday makers. The tables in front of the Café Corjon were deserted, and signs, "*À Louer*," were hung conspicuously from several windows of the Villa Blanche. There was only one person in the funicular as it ground its way up to Champney.

He found Katharine in the annex which she had built onto the chalet when she went to live there permanently; it provided two extra bedrooms and an extra drawing room, which she favored. This afforded a view of Grammont and the Cornettes de Bise, cut off at the other windows by the firs at the foot of the garden. She was engaged in embroidery, on which she spent much of her time these days. When he came into the room she took off her spectacles and stood up to kiss him.

"A good journey?"

"Yes. I see Stanley has arrived."

She nodded. "Yesterday. Have you spoken to him?"

"Not yet. He was in the garden with the twins. They didn't see me. How are the boys?"

"They've gone off for a few days, climbing. They were talking about the Dent du Midi."



"I talked about that once myself. Lye and I thought of doing it. Probably we would have done if the attraction here hadn't been stronger."

He smiled comfortably. Old memories, old jokes, had a power to sustain. Lately he had found more pleasure in the few weeks each year he spent in La Jatte.

Katharine said, "You will hardly do it now."

"I might. Why not? Taking it a little more easily. How is Peppi doing this season?"

"Badly. The whole village is. Very few English come out since the devaluation. I'm told some hotels in Montreux have closed down."

"Temporary troubles," he said. "They'll sort themselves out."

He was in no hurry to tell her the news. The moment would come. Perhaps not even today. He felt the warm glow, thinking of it the tremor of delight. There were still things that made one young again; achievement did.

"You sound optimistic," Katharine said. "More than you were in your speech at the annual general meeting, if the reports are correct."

"That was for the benefit of the shareholders. A little pessimism does them good. I bought another five thousand when the shares dropped."

"Doesn't that amount to chicanery?"

"I told them the truth. What I didn't tell them was my own conviction about things—and that isn't evidence, anyway. I'm not withholding facts."

She smiled. "It wasn't a serious criticism. You're becoming too sensitive."

He grinned in return. "I get more like Caesar's wife every day. Wouldn't she have had to be above suspicion even from Caesar?"

"We're not so exalted." She moved across to the bell push. "Will you have coffee now?"

"Let's have it on the veranda."

The clouds were breaking up; lances of sunshine wounded the hillside, spilling golden blood. They sat in the wicker chairs—they had been repainted blue, matching the shutters on the windows—and talked quietly. With Kitty, John thought, I feel old, and

content with it. With Peggy I feel young. And apart from the old and the young there is my inmost self, unchanged, unchanging. It is the attitude that counts in life.

They could hear the voices of the children in the garden, distant at first, and then nearer.

He asked, "Have you fixed things—about Jane? I have it all arranged for Joe."

"Yes, it's fixed." She looked out toward the hills. "I suppose it has to be done."

"Of course it must, if they're to have any sort of education." He paused, with slight awkwardness. "What will you do, Kitty?"

"I shall find things to do."

"Here? Or in England?"

He was aware as he spoke that he had scarcely put the suggestion in a welcoming way. But there was no point in pretending. Their lives were separate and could not be joined together again.

Katharine said, "I don't think I want to go back to England."

He let her words lie in a silence. The children now were directly beneath them. They were arguing about something. He heard Stanley's voice, excited, almost angry:

"How can anybody believe that kind of rubbish? It's been proved, over and over again. No one but a fool believes any differently."

Joseph's smaller, pedantic voice said, "I don't think it's been proved at all. How could it be?"

"By the fossils, of course!"

In her huskier voice, Jane said, "It doesn't say anything about fossils in the Bible."

"Ah," John said, "evolution. I suppose that will be more of the good Thiernand's work. We're none too soon in making the change."

"The Bible! What's the Bible got to do with it? You don't learn any science from the Bible."

"The Bible," Joseph said, "is the word of God. It tells you how life began."

Incredulously, Stanley said, "You mean, about God making the world in six days and then knocking off for a rest? And all that

about taking a rib from Adam and making it into Eve? Is that what you think happened?"

"Yes, of course it's what happened. It says so."

"Did you know he was teaching them all this?" John asked.

Kitty shook her head. "It doesn't matter, surely. Some children are very religious at that age."

"Well, then," Stanley said, "if there were only Adam and Eve, and they had two sons, Cain and Abel, how was it Cain went and found a wife after he killed Abel?"

He spoke with heavy sarcasm, the sophisticate crushing the naiveté of a fool with one hammer blow. On the veranda, John smiled, and Katharine smiled back.

"Come on," Stanley insisted, "how do you explain that?"

"Monsieur Thiernand explained it," Joseph said. "Cain and Abel weren't the only children. There may have been several daughters. They didn't always think girls important enough to write down."

"That's twisting it," Stanley said. It seemed a thought struck him. "Anyway, they'd be brother and sister—so they couldn't marry."

"It wasn't forbidden in those days. That was before Moses. The Pharaohs, who ruled Egypt, they used to marry their sisters. Didn't you know that?"

Sophistication had shifted corners; the hammer blow was blunted.

Running words together in his anger, lapsing into a broad Home Counties accent, Stanley said, "Anyway, that's got nothing to do with evolution! The fossils are there. And they show there were menlike creatures thousands of years before the Bible says there were. They prove evolution."

"That men are descended from apes?"

"Yes." He mimicked Joseph's voice: "That men are descended from the apes. That's what they prove."

"I think it's silly. Don't you, Jane?"

"Do you?" The anger could scarcely be contained. "I don't think so. When I look at you two, I don't think you've descended very far. You look like monkeys, the pair of you. A couple of ugly

monkeys. Why don't you get married, like the Pharaohs did, and then you might have real monkeys for children!"

John leaned over the balcony. He said, "Stanley!"

The three faces looked up to him: the twins, puzzled, perhaps hurt, scarcely comprehending; and Stanley, his rage and resentment and petty triumph turning to fear and shame. He did not say anything.

"I couldn't help overhearing what you said just then," John told him. "It was unpardonable, the act of a gutter child. While you are in this house, I insist that you behave with a little decency. To start with, you will beg your cousins' pardons. At once."

Their gazes were linked. The boy's face had gone white, his slightly full lips were trembling.

"Do you hear me?" John said. "Now." Stanley turned away from him. Suspecting defiance, John added more loudly, "I insist."

"I'm sorry," Stanley said. The words cost an effort.

"Not what anyone would call gracious," John said, "but I suppose it will have to do."

Stanley ran away, around the corner of the house. The twins looked after him and then turned back toward the garden. Jane began to cry quietly, and Joseph took her hand to comfort her.

Katharine said, "They are used to being made fun of. Some of the Swiss children do it."

"Jane's crying."

"Not because of what was said by Stanley."

"I think it was. And for his own sake, he needs to be checked. He's learned no manners at all."

"He's a little uncouth," Katharine agreed. "That will be due to the kind of school he has had to go to."

"And Wilf."

"Yes. He's clever, though, isn't he? He's very young to have got a scholarship to a grammar school." She paused. "Do you think Paston Hall will be right for Joey?"

"I should think so. It's costing enough. They have all kinds of special equipment—physical-training stuff."

"You're having an expensive time just now, aren't you? With three of them at university."

"Worth it. Steve's doing well, and Lionel will do better."

"And Richard," she said dryly, "is in the running for a double blue and has learned enough to regard Johannisberg as the only drinkable Swiss wine."

John laughed. "That's about it! But it's not wasted, is it? Not on the future Sir Richard Burchall."

He had thought he would make a greater occasion of telling her, but suddenly the moment had been ripe. She looked at him, half expectant, half puzzled.

"What does that mean?"

He said, "Tom Wamwright approached me some months back. The Government wanted to honor me. A tribute to Lancashire cotton—and to contributions of various kinds. They were offering a bachelor knighthood."

"But in that case . . ."

"I turned it down. Very politely, of course, but I begged not be considered. And to show how I appreciated the honor they'd offered to pay me, I sent a check for another thousand for the funds. Privately I told Tom I wasn't interested in honors for myself."

"And so?"

"Nothing at first. The Birthday List came and went. But Tom can take a hint and carry it to the right place. He gave me the news a couple of days ago: a baronetcy in the New Year List." He smiled at her. "Sir John and Lady Burchall. Will that do?"

She nodded soberly. "Yes. Everything's turned out well for you, John, hasn't it? Of course, you've deserved it."

"I don't know about deserving—I never expected it."

"You have deserved it."

There was a noise behind them, and they looked back toward the sitting room. Stanley stood in the doorway. He looked stiff and white, and one shoulder was pulled down by the weight of the cheap cardboard suitcase he was holding.

He said to Katharine, "I want to go home, Mrs. Burchall. I've packed my things."

Katharine said, "Stanley. Come over here—"

John interrupted. "You want to go back, do you? Right away?"

"Yes."

John looked at his watch. "There's a train down to Montreux in half an hour. You can catch that. The night train to London leaves about half past ten. You will have to occupy yourself till then. Have you got your return ticket?"

"Yes."

"And how about food?"

Katharine said, "John!" He waved her to silence.

"I can buy some. I've got the money you sent me." Stanley looked at Katharine. "I'll pay it back."

"All right," John said. "I have a good trip."

The boy looked as though he would say something, and then turned away. He began to walk across the drawing room toward the hall. After he had gone a few steps, John called, "Stanley! Come here."

He came back to the doorway. He did not say anything. It was plain that speech, even the simplest thing, would precipitate tears.

John said, "Take that case upstairs again and unpack it. Go on."

"I want to go home." Stanley screwed his eyes up, but the tears came. He rubbed his sleeve across his face.

"You have come here in our charge," John said. "We are responsible for you, and we will make arrangements for your return at the proper time. Now go upstairs, as I've told you. You can stay in your room until you've recovered your temper. I hope we shan't need to refer to this business again during the rest of your stay."

Stanley stared in silence for a moment before he went. They heard his footsteps dragging on the stairs.

Katharine said, "I'll go up to him."

"No. Leave him."

"You've been hard."

"It will do him good. He needs discipline. He's been allowed to do as he likes. I've treated him no differently from the way I would have treated our own children."

"Our own are different."

"Yes," John said with satisfaction, "they are. That's my real good fortune. Dicky, Steve, Lionel. One wouldn't change anything in any of them."

From the garden came the voices of the twins, playing one of their incomprehensible private games. John stood up and leaned against the balcony. The sky had largely cleared to the south, and above the green rampart of Caux it was possible to see the jutting fragment of brown that was the crest of the Dent du Midi.

"I wonder if they're there by now," he said. "They couldn't have a better day for it."





## THREE



# I

**O**FTEN between the summer and the winter there were no guests, and those were the times that Peppi liked them to come to the Chalet Russe. Of course, he had not said they could come only then, and when they were smaller they had sometimes gone through the little gate into the garden to play—the top part of the garden, where it was mostly vegetables, and the tool sheds, and old Jean-Pierre working away and paying no attention to them or anything else. But they had been seen by guests one day, two English ladies going up to the wood to look at the waterfall. The ladies had taken them for local children, and as they scuttled away through the hazels they had heard one of them say, “Good heavens! Like two little gargoyles. Where on earth do they come from, I wonder?”

And the other lady replied, “Twins, aren’t they? Poor little things.”

After that they did not go into Peppi’s garden when there was even the slightest chance of their being seen there. As Jane said, “Peppi’s guests might go away if they see ugly ones like us in the garden; and then Peppi would be even poorer than he is.”

In November it was different. Peppi was all alone in the big house, and he would make them sweet milky tea and give them marshmallow biscuits and tell them stories about wars and splen-

dors. They sipped their tea and never interrupted, as he told them of the time the guns froze in the wintry marshes and the men had to chip them free the next morning with the Germans advancing on them; or of the royal balls at St. Petersburg, the silks and brocades and diamonds, and all manner of fine things to eat.

"Ah, you are so quiet!" he would say sometimes. "Are you listening, or are you asleep? You are always so quiet."

"We are listening, Peppi. Ask us anything, and see if we've been listening."

"My little mice! Another biscuit for the mice. Will you like that?"

On this particular day, after having their tea and cakes they all went up to the coachhouse, which was what Peppi called the garage; a part of the roof had fallen down and he had to mend it. He was working high up on a ladder, so that they could not help him, and it became dull just watching. In the end they wandered back to the house. It was late afternoon, with the light draining out of a gray, untidy sky. The air was beginning to be cold, and they went to warm themselves in front of the log fire in the sitting room. Joseph put his arm round Jane's shoulders, and they stared together into the glowing red ashes.

"I should hate to be burned," he said.

Jane nodded. "The worst of everything."

"In only seventy-two years, the whole world burning up to a cinder. We might be still alive. We shall be seventy-eight if we are. People often live longer than that."

"Monsieur Thiernand may be wrong."

"He was very sure. Last time by water, this time by fire. Perhaps we might die before then if we wish for it."

"Not you first," she said quickly.

"Both together."

She nestled against him. "Now I'm warm. Shall we play—"

"Hide-and-seek," he supplied. "Yes. It's better when it's just beginning to be dark. You first?"

"Close your eyes. Count to fifty."

She slipped away silently. At the appointed time he went seeking her. Peppi did not mind them doing this; he had given them the run of the house. In return, they were especially careful not to

break things or make them untidy. Joseph hunted on, from room to room, as quietly and carefully as Jane had gone about hiding. He found her in due course, hiding behind a big chest in the bedroom on the first floor. They burst into small peals of recognition and delight. Finding was the nicest part of the game.

When it was his turn to hide, Joseph went still higher. There was a place, right under the roof, which you reached by means of a wooden ladder and a trap door. The floor was boarded, but the steeply sloping sides were the sides of the roof itself, and there were no separating walls, only massive beams coming up through the floor and arching out into the darkness above. It was all very dark; the only light came from small windows at either end.

Up here there were old trunks and cases, broken skis and sledges, an old-fashioned gramophone, a broken sword—all kinds of things which they had played with. Joseph stood in the deep shadow, behind one of the wooden arches, and when Jane put her head up through the trap door and then crept through and began to look all round, he kept very still and quiet, watching her but not betraying himself. She passed very close to him, but failed to see him. She looked all round, and he heard her humming a tune, "Valencia," in her small husky voice. He pressed himself against the wood, secretly smiling.

But when, after she had looked everywhere, she went back to the trap door and the stairs, he could not bear the thought of her going down, away from him, leaving him here in the dust and the darkness.

He called out, "Here, here!" and she laughed and ran toward him, and they met in the middle of the floor, holding each other's arms and gently banging their foreheads together, as they sometimes did when they were happy or excited. They went down the steps, carefully closing the trap door behind them, and stood on the top landing and looked out of the window across the garden. The hill stretched steeply up, covered with firs, marked near the top by the silver scar of the waterfall. At its foot lay the terraces of the gardens, and to the right the coachhouse, where they could hear Peppi working, banging at something with a hammer.

"My turn again," Jane said. "Close your eyes. Count sixty. I scarcely had time before."

He searched each floor in turn, going down through the house. He went down to the basement cellars, where there were the rooms lined with racks for bottled fruit, the one with the bottles of wine—not many now, as Peppi said—the wood store, the *blanchisserie*. He did not find her anywhere, and after softly calling “Coo-ee” he went back upstairs and began his search again.

He hunted meticulously, but with a growing sense of unease. He called in the dusk of the rooms now, “Jane! Show. Please, Jane.”

It was an appeal, phrased without apparent urgency because she always heeded his appeals. She had hidden better than he had sought, and it was time for the game to be over, for smiling and the clasping of hands. He called in the bedrooms, “Jane?” But there was no answer.

When he got back to the top landing, he suddenly guessed what she had done. Instead of going downstairs, as he had assumed she would, she had doubled back and, without noise, gone up the steps again and into the attic. He could not have done it because boards would have creaked under him, but Jane, although her leg was crooked, was defter and more delicate than he. She could wear silence like a gown.

He climbed the steps, pushed the door up and called, “Jane! I went right down to the cellars, looking for you.” He came up into the attic. “You are here, aren’t you? Where are you?”

There was no answer. The shadows were thicker, heavier than before, the small square of window light at once fainter and more conspicuous. He thought of the empty house beneath him, and her absence wounded him. He must go down and look once more; there was nothing else to do. He went back to the trap door, but heard a noise as he did so. It was very small, inarticulate, neither a cry nor a call—a tiny whimper in the dark. “Jane?” Only silence. He began to be afraid, as he sometimes was in dark places when Jane was not with him, but he remained at the top of the steps, peering into the dimness. At last the sound came again: a whimper, a groan?

Now he knew it came from behind the old trunks, against the sloping wall. He went forward, his heart pounding, and heard the sound repeated. “Jane,” he whispered. It must be Jane, yet could

not be. She would never refuse to answer him when he wanted her so badly.

Something stuck out from behind the farthest trunk: Jane's boot with the heavy platform sole. He ran forward then.

"Jane, Jane! Don't hide. I've found you. Come out, come out."

She did not answer. She lay wedged between the trunk and the angle of the wall, and there was no room for him to get in there to her. He called her again, still more fearfully, and pulled at her foot. When he pulled hard he could drag her toward him. She neither resisted nor helped him, and he remembered the bird they had found dead in the woods and how the airy lightness of its body, when one lifted it, had turned to limpness and heaviness.

He got her out and lifted her head. As he did so, between clenched teeth, she uttered the small groan he had heard before. She was not dead. But dying? He looked into her face, saw staring whiteness where her dark lively eyes had been, and ran, silently at first, but then screaming, for Peppi.

Peppi carried her down to the sitting room and sat holding her in his big armchair in front of the fire. He said to Joseph, "In the sideboard—brandy. Pour some in a little glass and bring it to me."

Fetching the glass, Joseph said, "She is not dying, Peppi?"

"No."

"Did she fall and hurt herself? Was that it?"

"It is a sickness. *Le petit mal*." Peppi stared at her small distorted face. "*Ceci aussi?* Must one little one bear so much?"

"She will get better, Peppi?"

"Very soon." Holding her head with a gentle firmness, Peppi pressed the edge of the glass between her lips. "We must make her better." He glanced, smiling, at Joseph. "What would you do without your little Jane? She is your blessing, *n'est-ce pas?* And you are hers."

Their world was made up of Chalet Fanshawe and its garden and the slope of the wood above it where the trees grew thickly. The garden, since the house itself was built into the hillside, lay open to the view of people passing along the road to Champney, but a hedge had been planted along the side of the road which

each summer grew thicker and taller, and down there they could play unobserved even when the fields above La Jatte were crowded with visitors. At the beginning, when they were very little, they had wondered about the world outside, and once Jane, who was the more adventurous, had persuaded him to slip out with her, and they had gone through the fields to the village. It had been a strange, exciting experience; they had been taken home at last by the woodman, in his cart. Mummy had not scolded them—she rarely did that—but she had been upset, as they saw at once, and she had tried to explain to them that it was better to stay inside the garden, to keep out of sight . . . She had given up the explanation and hugged them. In those days she hugged them a great deal, but the demonstrations, like the explanation, left too many things unsaid. They had known that they were different, and that the difference extended to Mummy as well as to other people. By fussing with them she did not make it less important but more. They retreated from her, confusedly, and took refuge in the simple unambiguous knowledge of each other's love and need.

When they were older and understood that it was their ugliness that set them apart, they made some attempt to get closer to her, to show her that they realized what she had been trying to tell them. But already it was too late. She watched them with uncomprehending eyes, resigned to the fact that their strangeness was in mind as well as body, and they saw they could not comfort her. In their small hierarchy of affection she came highest, far above M. Thiernand and Jeanne-Marie, even above Peppi, but that which they felt for each other was something else, and the hierarchy had no part in it.

When the brothers came to stay they retreated still further and spent long hours up in their room, playing games, or talking, or from their balcony watching the world that worked and played outside. At times, Mummy tried to persuade them to come out more. "They are your brothers," she told them once. "You don't have to hide from them." She paused, waiting for an answer. "You needn't be afraid they will laugh at you."

She had never before made so direct a reference to their appearance, and when the words were spoken there was silence while she looked at them and they at her. Then, after halfheartedly re-



peating that they should come down, she went herself, leaving them alone.

Jane said, "Did you know people would laugh at us? Are we funny? I've never seen Jeanne-Marie laughing."

"She means people from outside."

"But we never see them."

"That is why, perhaps. She would not like to have them laugh at us."

"So we are funny." She twisted her face. "Is that more funny still?"

He laughed. "I can do that, too." He grimaced at her, and she grimaced back. "Would you mind if people laughed at you?"

She shook her head. "I don't think so. Would you?"

"No. Except perhaps if I was on my own."

She said thoughtfully, "The brothers are pretty."

"Handsome, for boys."

"Then handsome. Which do you think is best?"

"Lionel. But Dick is the strongest."

"I like Steve best, I think. He is quieter than the others."

"Yes. Dick stamps his feet, and Lionel talks loudly. They are all going out this afternoon. I heard them talking about it. They are going to climb up Jaman."

"If we had a telescope, could we see them climbing up the side, standing on the top?"

"I think so."

"Perhaps you can ask for one for your birthday."

"That's months and months. After Christmas."

She said dreamily, "Isn't it nice to think of the snow, now when it's summer and warm and all the mountains are brown instead of white? Don't you like that?"

"The other way, too—thinking of summer in the winter."

"Yes, but not so much. All the whiteness and softness, and people laughing and calling in the snow."

"There will be just us this Christmas. It is the turn of the brothers and Daddy to stay in England."

She sighed. "That's better."

"Should we go down?"

"No. Has Queen Spider moved? I can't see her in her web."

"Mummy wants us to."

"She has the brothers. They're only here for a few weeks in the year. She has us all the time."

"She wants us to be together with them."

"That's no good." She shook her head. "How could it be?"

They admired the brothers and even, in a way, liked them. With Daddy, they were awed; even alone together they spoke of him in terms which marked the gulf between his world and theirs. During his visits there was a ritual of presentation, and they would not have dreamed of retreating from his presence until he authorized it. They knew that they disappointed him and were grateful for his occasional smiles and words of encouragement.

The awe did not prevent their eavesdropping, when they got the chance, on his conversations with Mummy. They were curious about everything and would listen, half comprehending, to snatches of talk. After they had been put to bed, with Jeanne-Marie out for the evening and the brothers still playing in the fields, they crept back to the landing and sat there, arms entwined, smelling the richness of cigar smoke that wafted up the stairs and listening to the distant voices.

"Yes, they're intelligent enough, but some of the things they pick up!"

"He teaches the basic things to them quite well. I don't think it matters about the rest. Not yet, anyway."

"It should be possible to get someone better."

"Not easily, up here. Out of season it's very quiet. And he's used to the children. A young person might not be."

"I suppose not. They do speak French well. Better than the boys. That's natural, I suppose. But some of the other things. I'm not sure Joey doesn't think England is in the middle of Lac Leman!"

"He was confused. He knows well enough."

"Jane's the sharper."

On the landing, he nudged Jane with delight at this tribute to her sharpness. She smiled, bobbing her head down with a little forward shrug.

"Yes, in most things. But she is less clever at arithmetic."

There was a pause, the chink of glass, a sound of footsteps which caused them to shrink back from the banisters. Then:

"Any more attacks lately?"

"Now and then. Nothing very bad."

"What does Leone say?"

"They will get worse." Another, smaller pause. "For the long term—that's unchanged."

"They live in each other's pockets, don't they?"

"As you see."

"We shall have to do something—before the long term gets too close."

"Perhaps. Not yet."

"And Joey will have to have some sort of life built for him. We shall have to think seriously about that in due course."

"I know."

"Are you sure you're not too wrapped up in them to see things clearly?"

"Perhaps. It's my life here."

"You should have a break."

"I get breaks—a week in Paris this summer."

"It's not enough."

"I don't like to leave them longer with Jeanne-Marie."

"Get a trained nurse, then. Why not?"

"I prefer not to."

"Because you want to keep them to yourself? Is that always good for them? Isn't it selfish?"

A laugh, but not of mirth. "Keep them to myself?"

"You've had that possessiveness from the day they were born. I remember."

"Possessiveness has to have some response, however slight. With them, there's nothing outside each other."

"Then, in that case, why? Duty?"

"I don't know why. After seven years I have no reasons for anything."

"It was your choice, remember. And still is."

"Yes, I know, I know. Listen, that's the boys coming."

They had already heard it: the sound of talk and laughter and boots crunching on the gravel. Quietly they slipped back to their

room and their beds. The air was still light, the evening as warm as it ever was at this altitude. They lay and peered sideways at each other from behind ramparts of bedclothes and talked in whispering voices.

"You're to have a sort of life built for you," Jane said. "What kind will that be, do you think? How do you build a life?"

"I don't know."

"But not me."

"I wonder why?"

"Because I'm a girl? That must be it. Girls get married. Jeanne-Marie is going to be married next year. But they have to be pretty. A little bit pretty, anyway. So no one will marry me."

"Nor me either."

"It isn't important for boys. You become a bachelor, like Monsieur Thiernand."

"If I don't have a wife," he said, "and you don't have a husband, we can live together, can't we? In a cottage, like Hansel and Gretel."

She giggled. "In each other's pockets! That was funny, wasn't it?"

"Yes. We can, can't we?"

"We would have to have money. Perhaps we could make things."

"Toys."

"Yes. And what was over, give to Peppi. And some to Monsieur Thiernand."

"To print his book. And Jeanne-Marie."

"Jeanne-Marie will be married by then and have a husband to get money for her."

"We could still buy her presents, like we do at Christmas, picking them out of the catalogue."

"Would you like to go in a shop? Sometimes I think I would."

"Perhaps." He was starting to be sleepy. From below, the sounds of the brothers calling took on a distant, lulling note. "Or a station. I think I would like a station better than a shop."

"A bat," she said, "flashing past the window. I wish I could fly, Joey. I think I would like that best of all."

"Yes."

"Sometimes I dream of flying—going right up in the sky, look-

ing down on Jaman and Rochers de Naye, and the chalet, just as a bird does."

His voice muffled by the sheet, he said, "That would be nice."

"But then sometimes I fall, and the air's so thin and cold and everything such a long way beneath me."

"Don't fall," he said. The room spun lazily into sleep. "Don't fall, Janey."

They took a trip to Lausanne the following spring, in a motor-car. It was so that Jane could be examined at the hospital, and at first Mummy said that only Jane would go, but when they both begged her very hard she let Joseph go as well. When the motor-car stopped at the hospital, and Jane was taken out, Joseph stayed in, and the chauffeur took him for a drive in the country. Then they went back to the hospital, and Mummy and Jane came out to the car. As it moved away, very excitedly he gave them the two bunches of flowers he had picked for them.

"Oh, so lovely," Jane said. "Thank you, Joey. I wish I could have picked some. But they are lovely."

Mummy said, "Then the car was stopped? You got out?"

"Yes. The field was full of flowers."

"Were there people there?"

"No one at all. It was on a hill, at the end of a little road. There was no one who could look at me, Mummy."

She was silent. Jane began to tell him about the hospital, and he listened intently; it was an even stranger adventure than his own had been, and she always told things more excitingly than he did. It was not until they were back at home and having tea that he took up the telling again. It was Jane's turn to listen as he told of the places he had seen, the villages, different mountains in the distance, cows that were black and white instead of fawny brown like the ones that grazed the slopes above La Jatte. For each of them it had been a day of triumphant experience. They discussed which of the two happenings had been the more interesting and decided in favor of Jane's visit to the hospital.

Then, demurring, Jane said, "But there was nothing to bring back from mine. You brought back the flowers."

They had been put into vases and stood on either end of the

piano top, a glow of color against the brown wood. Excusing herself, Jane slipped down from her chair and went to stand beneath them.

*"Elles sont belles, belles,"* she said.

Mummy said, "The chauffeur was kind to you, Jocy? Did you like him?"

"Yes. He talked to me all the way. He said we might stop and pick some flowers, and when I said we weren't allowed to go where people might see us—"

She broke in quickly: "You told him that?"

"Yes. Shouldn't I have done? Is it a secret? He seemed to understand. He said he would find a place where there was no one but us, and we could pick flowers in peace. And he did. It was along a funny steep road, which made the motor jog up and down—you know, bouncing—but at the end there was this big, wide field and you could see for miles, and there was no one, not even a house. He helped me pick the flowers."

"Perhaps you were the luckier," Jane said from the piano. "I think you were now."

Mummy said, "Would you like both to go for a motor trip again one day—to somewhere like that?"

"Could we?" Jane asked. She hobbled quickly across to Mummy and peered up at her. "Is it possible?"

"I think it might be. I will speak to the chauffeur about it." She paused. "We might take luncheon one day, and have a picnic."

They looked at each other, their eyes lit with wonder and an apprehension of too much delight. Joseph left the table and stood beside Jane. They stared at each other and whirled to run upstairs.

"Must you run away?" Mummy called to them.

They paused and turned in the doorway.

Jane said, "Thank you, Mummy. We would both love that—the picnic. Do you want us to stay?"

She sighed. "No. Go if you want to."

Peppi's first visitors had not come yet, and when they had returned from the picnic they went to tell him about it, going by the way of the small wooden gate that connected the two

gardens. Although they were full of their news, Jane at least retained her usual caution and it was she who saw that there was someone with Peppi in the porch—a strange man. They crouched behind the wall that encircled the rose garden and listened and watched. The stranger was on the point of departure. Peppi bade goodbye to him, in a language that was neither French nor English, and he walked off down the drive, a tall handsome man, carrying a flat leather case. Peppi stood looking after him. When the man had gone between the gateposts at the bottom, Peppi turned round to enter the house, but they called to him, and he stopped and smiled and welcomed them as they rushed to greet him.

They talked about the trip and the picnic as he led them into the house, Jane telling the story because she did it better and did not get confused and squeaky, and Joseph putting in small comments from time to time. Peppi listened to them with great attention. They told him all they could remember: of the great valley with mountains on either side; of the place where the road ran beside the railway tracks and where a train, a big train with long carriages, came up behind them and raced them and drew ahead; of the huge waterfall pouring out of the side of a cliff; of men and big boys fishing in a wide river, and a castle perched up on a crag; of the narrower valley where sometimes the rock towered over them, with a deep abyss on the other side of the road; and of the field of the picnic with the tremendous red rocks behind them and more snowy mountains in front; and flowers—more flowers than one could dream of.

"We have some for you, Peppi," Joseph said. "Jeanne-Marie has put them in water to revive them. We will bring them to you when they are revived."

"It has been a great day for you," Peppi said, when there was chance for him to speak. "One that you will remember for a long time. And for me too. I had almost given up hope of such a day."

Joseph asked, with interest, "Did you have a picnic, Peppi?"

"No—better than a picnic for me. I had news."

"From the man with the flat case?" Jane asked.

He pinched her check. "You are so sharp, my Jancy!" He was in

a great good humor. "Shall we have a biscuit, or have you eaten too much on your picnic? Bring me the tin."

"Was it good news, Peppi?" Jane asked. "Will you be getting a lot of money?"

"Much better than money!"

"Tell us."

"It is news of my children, my Alex and Trina."

"The ones who were left behind in Russia?"

"It is twelve years since I saw Trina—nearly as long since I saw Alex. And they are alive, and well! I had no news of them in my inquiries because they are living now in a different part of Russia—in the south, where they went after the failure of the counter-revolution. They used different names, also, to escape the Bolsheviks. And they could not write to me because the Bolsheviks might have opened the letters, and then they would have been put in prison, even executed. But they have survived. That is the important thing."

"Have you had a letter now?" Joseph asked. "Did the man bring you a letter?"

"There was a letter, but he was seized by the guards at the frontier and had to destroy it."

He was using terms which they did not understand—guards, frontier—and Joseph realized that he was talking like this because he was excited, as they had been with the news of the picnic. It was a wonderful thing, he saw, that had happened to Peppi.

"But he has seen them," Peppi went on, "seen them both, and talked to them! They are alive and well. And, best of all, he can help them to leave Russia—to come here to Switzerland. By the end of the summer he will bring them here to La Jatte."

Jane said, "Why didn't he bring them now? Didn't they want to come right away?"

Peppi laughed. "They will come as soon as they can. No mistake about that! But money is needed first; that is why he came to me. He must have money for bribes, so that they can leave Russia."

"What are bribes?" Joseph asked.

Peppi took him on his knee. "Imagine there is a great big fence that goes for miles and miles, and there is a gate in it through which you want to pass. But there is a man guarding the gate,



with a gun. A bribe is money; it is what you give the man with the gun to close his eyes for a few minutes while you slip through the gate."

"I should be frightened," Joseph said, "even if he did close his eyes."

"Well, you are very little. And my children are man and woman grown. Alex is thirty-six. It is different for them. And the man who came today will see that everything goes easily, with no risk. He has been a soldier, as I was, as Alex was."

Jane said, "Where will you get the money, Peppi, since you are so poor? We have some left from Christmas still; you can have that. But I have only got ten francs, and Joey even less."

"We don't get pocket money," Joseph explained, "because it's no use to us."

"I shall not need your ten francs," Peppi said, "but I am deeply grateful that you should offer it. You need not worry. I will go to the bank tomorrow, and they will give me the money."

"Then why didn't you go to the bank before?" Jane asked. "You've been poor all the time. Wouldn't it have been better to go to the bank?"

Peppi laughed. "It is not so easy! When a bank lends you money, you must pay them each month for the use of it—and it is not cheap. And you must have something which they call security."

"Have you got security?" Joseph asked.

"I have this house. They will take the thing which says I am the owner, and then if I do not pay them the money back in time, the house becomes theirs."

"Do you mean that the bank might come here, to Chalet Russe?"

"No. And there is nothing to fear. When Alex and Trina come, we shall make lots of money together. We shall do great things, here at the chalet. Perhaps we shall mend the croquet lawn, and we will teach you to play at croquet. You will enjoy that, I think. Ah, it will all be different with young people here. And you will like them, my Alex and Trina. I know you will like them."

"Perhaps they will not like us," Joseph said.

"I promise you they will," said Peppi. "Who could help liking my little mice?"

They saw nothing of Peppi during the summer. It was the last good year for La Jatte, the last summer in which American accents were heard in the Hôtel Édouard, the year in which it seemed as though, for all the newly fashionable resorts in the Oberland, the hills above Montreux were once again casting their lure over the tourist. So M. Thiernand explained to the twins when, with the windows open against the heat, their lessons were interrupted by voices of hikers and the clatter of motorcars on the road. The prospect filled him, it appeared, both with pride and apprehension—pride that others should recognize the beauty of *ce petit beau coin*, apprehension in case, with the tourist influx rising to so great a height, he might be forced to remove from the little room in the Hôtel de Naye where he had lived for over ten years.

"They are thinking to build an extension to the Hôtel Champney," he said. "Imagine! There has been nothing such as this since before the war."

"Peppi is very busy, too," Joseph said. "We saw three motorcars by the coachhouse."

"The world is busy," said M. Thiernand. He stretched his long neck and looked out the window as though expecting to see wonderful, fearful things in the summer sky. "The devil also!" he exclaimed, turning back to them swiftly and threateningly. "We are learning our tables, not discussing the tourists who come to La Jatte."

Neither the reversal of mood nor the injustice of blaming them for the interruption to the lesson were unfamiliar. They bowed their heads obediently and smiled to each other when he turned away again. They heard him muttering to himself and knew, when he brought out his little note pad and started jotting things down, that he would be unlikely to speak to them for the rest of the afternoon; M. Thiernand was writing his book. They already knew the tables he had set them, but the silence must not be broken. They did not mind that. They sat quietly, hands touching, and

listened to the clamor of the world outside and to M. Thiernand's mumbling, incomprehensible commentary on it.

After tea, Joseph spoke again of Peppi being busy—this time to their mother. She was sitting with a book on the veranda, and she looked over it and nodded.

"Very busy. And he's not so very young now. He should have some kind of help."

"When Alex and Trina come," Joseph said, "he will have enough help."

Mummy put the book down on her lap. She stared at him in some bewilderment.

"Alex and Trina?"

"Peppi's children. Didn't you know about Peppi's children?"

"What did you mean—about their coming?"

"He had to leave them behind in Russia, but soon they are coming here to Switzerland. The man with the flat case is to bring them."

She caught his arms and pulled him to her. "Tell me, who is the man with the flat case?"

He told her how they had seen him from the garden, and what Peppi had told them afterward.

"And the bank has lent Peppi the money," Jane said. She was sitting in the window seat, her heavy leg drawn up beside her. "For the bribes."

"Did he say how much money?" Mummy asked.

Joseph shook his head. Jane said, "If he doesn't pay it back in time, the bank comes and takes the chalet. It's called security."

"They would have been in their late thirties now," Mummy said. She spoke in a low voice, as though to herself. "Poor Peppi." She turned to Jane, speaking more directly. "Do you know if the man—with the flat case mentioned anything about Alex and Trina being married—about their having children?"

"Peppi didn't say that."

She shook her head. "When did this happen, Jane?"

"Weeks ago. We haven't been to see Peppi for weeks. There have been visitors all the time."

"Then it's too late."

"What is it too late for?" Joseph asked.

"Nothing. It doesn't matter." She saw their eyes, curious and intent on her. "For having a talk with Peppi. I would have had a talk with him if it hadn't been so long a time ago."

"About Alex and Trina?"

"Yes." She shook her head again, more gently, sadly. "I knew them very well."

Jeanne-Marie told them when the last of the summer visitors had left Chalet Russe; her cousin worked there as a cleaner. On the first possible morning, a damp misty day with the hazels dripping and cloud both down the valley toward Montreux and veiling Champney and a part of Cubly, they went through to see him; and he, expecting them, had marshmallow biscuits waiting, and sweet milky cocoa.

Embracing them, he said, "My little mice have been a long time gone! You should come even when I have visitors, you know. I am not too busy to say hello."

They smiled and evaded the suggestion; to discuss it, even with Peppi, would be unprofitable.

Joseph said, "Alex and Trina—have they come yet?"

"Not yet. There are some chocolate biscuits here too, if you would like those better."

Jane said, "No, thank you, Peppi. You said they would come by the end-of summer. It's the end now. We watched the cows being brought down from Jaman yesterday."

"There has been a small delay," Peppi said. "These things happen. To leave Russia today is no easy undertaking; one must watch the Bolsheviks and slip out when one can."

"But you gave him the money for the bribes."

"There are millions of Bolsheviks. One cannot bribe them all. But there is no need to worry. It will all be arranged in time. What are a few weeks, after twelve years?"

Joseph said, "Mummy asked if the man with the flat case said anything about them being married and having children. Did he, Peppi?"

"No." His voice, all at once, was slow and heavy. He looked at them, seeming tired. "You spoke of this with your mother, then?"

"Was that wrong? Was it a secret?"

"It does not matter."

"She won't tell anyone," Joseph said. "We'll ask her to promise, if you like."

"No. It is all right that your mother knows. She would not say anything that could harm them."

"Might they have children?" Jane asked. "They are old enough, aren't they?"

"I have thought of that, too." His face remained somber. "But he would have spoken of it, would he not? He had met them, talked to them."

They were abashed by the fierceness hidden beneath his speculation and did not answer.

Peppi went on broodingly, "And a wife, a husband, children—would not these have planted them beyond all chance of uprooting? Could one then believe they would come out, that things had not changed beyond hope of mending?"

Tanya, the big gray Persian cat, jumped from its place at a far window and stalked toward them. She came to Jane and rubbed her head, majestically purring, against her leg. Peppi watched and, after a moment, smiled.

"She likes you and she has not forgotten you! Let us talk of you, instead, and of all the things that have happened to you during the summer. What has happened?"

"Nothing much, Peppi," Jane said. "We have done our lessons, and played. The brothers came, and Daddy. That is all there was."

"No more picnics?"

"We are to go on one soon, now that the tourists have gone."

"I saw your brothers," Peppi said. "They are getting big. Richard is a man almost."

"He's seventeen," Jane said. "He has a pipe and a dinner jacket."

"Then he is a man. So. What else has happened?"

"Jane had two of her attacks," Joseph said. "Once in the garden, once in our bedroom—while she was saying her prayers."

Peppi lifted her up, his large face looking gravely into her small one.

"It is a coward, that sickness, and a bully, to attack a small

maiden while she is at her prayers. But we will not be afraid of it, will we? We will defy its wickedness."

He put her down again. "Come. If we have finished our cocoa, it is time for work. We will go and work in the garden, and even Tanya will chase a mouse, if it does not run too fast."

"Is it time for a bonfire?" Joseph asked.

"Today is too wet, but we can start making ready. There are a lot of things to do. It is as hard work making a garden ready for winter as for summer, and one must labor without hope of harvest."

"Isn't Jean-Pierre helping?" Joseph asked.

"Today he has his rheumatism. Jean-Pierre is growing old. As I am."

"Alex will help you when he comes. He is much younger."

"That is true." Peppi opened the toolshed and picked out a rake and a hoe. "Alex will help when he comes. But we must not leave it all for him to do, must we? We must do what we can first. There, my mice. The trowel for you, Jocy, and the little fork for Jane. Now we will work."

Usually Peppi had guests for Christmas, and so he would come to visit them, knowing they would not come to him. They would hear, if it were fine enough for them to be out in the garden, his boots crunching through the snow and his rough old voice singing, in French, a carol about the baby Jesus putting out His hands in winter and making the trees bud and the flowers bloom. He would have his presents for them, and for Mummy, and for the brothers when they were there; and they would give him presents in return, and he would drink a glass of wine before returning to the Chalet Russe.

But this year Jeanne-Marie had told them there were no guests for Christmas, and so, when it was eleven o'clock and Peppi had not yet visited them, they put on their heavy coats and took their presents and went out into the snow. They had made the presents themselves: Jane had worked a sampler with a verse of poetry on it, and Joseph, who was less clever, had made a painting of the Chalet Russe, as one saw it from the balcony of their bedroom, and put it in the frame of an old picture. They carried them

carefully as they went up through the garden, ducking when the hazel branches spilled down small cataracts of snow on them, and having to clear snow off the top of the little gate before they could find the latch. On the other side there were the terraces of whiteness dipping down to the house, the house itself white and still.

"Look," Jane said. "There is no smoke from the chimney."

Joseph stared at the bare outline of the snow-covered roof.

"Perhaps Peppi has gone out," he suggested.

"Well, there would still be a fire."

Their footsteps, as they walked down the paths, broke the virgin freshness of the snow. It had come during the night, and the sky, a dark, full gray, promised more. But there were marks going up from the drive to the porch, and in the porch the milk can was standing on the wooden bench. The top was not fitted tightly, and Joseph lifted it.

"It's frozen," he said. "Look—all ice."

"Only on top," Jane said. She rang the bell, and they heard the sound echo inside. There was no reply. She rang again, and Joseph flapped his arms, shivering from the cold.

"Perhaps he's asleep," he said.

Jane nodded her head. "Then we'll go in and wake him. The door's not locked."

They made their way, automatically, to the sitting room and stared about them. The curtains were still drawn, and only a little light filtered through. Things looked large, and unfamiliar. An oil lamp stood on the mantel shelf, but it had long guttered out. Below, the hearth was full of dead ashes.

"I think he must have gone out," Joseph said, his voice falling into a whisper.

"Or he may be in bed."

"Shall we go upstairs and look?"

They hesitated, unsure of what to do, awed by the room's dimness and untidiness.

Joseph said, "Perhaps he wants to rest. Perhaps we should come back another time."

Jane's silence indicated her assent to this proposition. They were preparing to go when a sound stopped them. It came from

one of the big armchairs, which had its back to the doorway where they stood.

Then Peppi's voice said, "Is that my little mice that I hear?"

His voice was slurred strangely, but there was no mistaking it. They ran round the chair to greet him. He was lying back, and there was a smell which they knew for brandy. Bottles rolled against their feet as they pressed toward him.

"Merry Christmas, Peppi!" they said.

"Is it day?" Peppi said. "It's so dark."

Joseph said: "It's past eleven o'clock! May I draw the curtains? Then you can see how late it is."

He dragged the heavy curtains across and then went back to the chair. Peppi was blinking at the light.

"Christmas Day," he said. "You are right. I have been asleep in my chair."

"We thought you must be asleep," Jane said, "because there was no smoke from the chimney."

"And so you came and visited me. That was kind."

"Jeanne-Marie said you would not have any visitors."

"She is correct. I have no visitors—only you, and you are my friends. Isn't that right?"

"We have the brothers and Daddy," Joseph said. "They came up from the hotel after breakfast. And Jeanne-Marie's sister has come in to help, since you do not need her and there is so much to do."

"I do not need her any more," Peppi said.

There was a gray-white stubble of whiskers over his face. His eyes were pouched and tired. His white hair was rumpled. He looked old and cold; his shirt gaped open at the neck.

"You will need her when the visitors come," Joseph said.

Peppi shook his head. "No. No more."

"Will Alex and Trina do the work instead?" Joseph asked. "Are they coming soon, Peppi? Are they coming for Christmas?"

"They are not coming. Not this winter."

"Then when? In the spring?"

Peppi shivered. "In so cold a winter, who can think of spring? Spring is a long long way from here."

Peppi's jacket was hanging behind the door. Jane went to get



it and brought it to him. He was awkward, and she helped him to put it on.

"You are kind, Janey," Peppi said. "You have all of woman in that small sad body." He looked at her, shaking his head gently. "I should not have said that."

Jane smiled. "I know it is a sad one."

Joseph said, "But, Peppi, why don't you ask the man with the flat case about Alex and Trina—about when they are to come? He can tell you."

"He has gone away, that man, into a far country."

"Then write him a letter, to ask him."

"He did not leave me his address. He is a busy man. He travels far and wide, going about his business. And he does not come the same way twice."

"Then you must just wait?"

"Yes. When one is old, one can only wait. Until one wearies of the waiting." He looked very sad when he said that.

Joseph, hoping to cheer him up, said, "We have brought you our Christmas presents, Peppi. Jane's is the nicest."

Peppi smiled at him, and the smile banished the sadness. "Is it so? Then you shall give me yours first."

Joseph gave Peppi the picture. He started to untie the knots, but his fingers fumbled. After a moment or two Joseph took it from him and opened it. Then Peppi looked at the picture.

"It is a fine painting," he said. "Such bold colors. And drawn with such care. I can tell each window." His finger unsteadily pointed. "That was my Trina's room. And that one Alex's. They would look out those windows at the snow, their hearts bursting for happiness that they were young and the world was theirs. It is a fine painting, Joey. I cannot tell you how fine it is."

"Now give him yours, Jane," Joseph said. "Give him the sampler."

Peppi watched while Jane unwrapped it. She gave it to him and he held it at arm's length, his eyes peering.

"So many stitches," he said, "with those nimble fingers. This is a sad unhappy world, but not so sad when one knows there is love in it. My eyes are not so good, Janey. Will you read the poem to me?"

"Yes, Peppi." Touching the sampler with the tips of her fingers, she recited:

"His lambs outnumber a noon's roses,  
Yct when night's shadows fall  
His blind old sheepdog, Slumber-Soon,  
Misses not one of all."

Her bright eyes lifted to Peppi's. "It is from a poem by Walter de la Marc," she said. "It is our favorite."

"Say it again, Janey."

As she recited the verse once more, Joseph looked at Peppi. Tears brimmed from Peppi's eyes and coursed down the wrinkles on his cheeks. Joseph came close to him, feeling the rough cloth of his old coat against his face.

Peppi blinked his eyes, but did not trouble to wipe away the tears. He said, in a stronger voice, "They are both wonderful presents. I am deeply grateful to you both. And not for these only. For all the times you have kept me company, for all your kindness. And my presents for you I have not even wrapped up—that is how lazy an old man I have become. Come, let us find them."

He got up with some effort from his chair and walked across the room. In the far window, where one looked out over the valley, the lake, the tall frozen peaks of the Savoy Alps, Caux and the jagged white majesty of the Dent du Midi, the telescope stood, heavy polished brass trimmed with black leather, on its tripod stand. Peppi took off the telescope and closed it up and did the same with the tripod. He handed them to Joseph.

"Can you carry these, Joey? I think you can. You are getting a big boy."

The magnificence astonished, even dismayed, Joseph.

"Really for me, Peppi?" he said. "To keep?"

"What else?"

Joseph stared at it, inarticulate with joy.

"Don't you like it?" Peppi said.

Then Joseph said, "It's the most wonderful present I ever had in all my life."

Peppi's hand roughly caressed his face. "To hear you say that

. . . You make me very happy, Joey. And now, my other mouse. For a little lady it is not so easy. But we have something, I think."

Against the bookcase, on the windowless side of the room, stood an old iron safe. Peppi took keys from his belt and opened it. There were smaller compartments inside, and he took another key to unlock one of them. He brought out an oblong leather case and brushed the dust away with one finger.

Holding the case, he said, "Someone may ask you, so I will tell you about what is inside. My Trina's birthday was in February, and in February we used to be here, at La Jatte. In the year before the war, the last time we came, I saw these in a shop in Montreux, and because I thought she would like them, and because the next year she would be twenty-one, I bought them and put them in the bank till we should return."

He clicked open the box. In the center there was an empty space; at either end was an earring, a gleaming red stone set with smaller white ones that flashed as the box tilted.

"There was a necklace also," Peppi said, "but that I had to sell. I kept the earrings. Now I wish you to have them, Janey."

Jane said, "They're beautiful, Peppi, but I think you should keep them for when Trina comes."

He snapped the box shut and pressed it into her hands.

"Trina does not need earrings any more. She would want you to have them. No, you must not say no. Take them. And now it is time for you to go home, I think, both of you."

Jane went to Peppi, stretched up and kissed him. When she did that, Joseph did the same. He felt the roughness of Peppi's whiskers and the dampness of his tears.

"Go now," Peppi said. "And do not come back today or tomorrow. I am going to be too busy. But remember that I love my little mice always. Do not forget that."

## 2

COUSIN STANLEY's visit came in the summer before the parting and seemed in that vexed and troubled time a harbinger of what lay ahead: the world's first onslaught on their small place of peace.

It was at Easter that Mummy had spoken of it. The brothers had not come—they had gone somewhere else with Daddy—and Jane and Joseph enjoyed the calm of their isolation, with only Mummy and Annette, the housekeeper. For three weeks there would be no M. Thiernand. They made a long complicated race track on the floor of the *salon*, winding past chair and table legs and under the claw feet of the piano, and raced the metal horses from the Escalado game over it. It was a game Jane had devised; you threw dice and moved the horse forward as many lengths as the dice showed. They had two horses each, named after forgotten winners of past classics. Joseph's Sansovin was well in the lead, and now he threw another six and it rounded the carpet corner, by the fireplace, a good twenty lengths ahead of its nearest rival.

Mummy came in from the hall, with a letter in her hand.

"From Daddy," she said. "He's sorry he and the brothers can't come and hopes you are both enjoying yourselves. He hopes you will like the Easter eggs." She put down the letter, smiling. "You

haven't seen them yet—I'm keeping them for tomorrow. They came up from Séchaud's yesterday, quite enormous ones."

"Does he say anything else?" Joseph asked.

At Christmas they had asked him if they might have a puppy, and he had said he would have to see. It would be a trouble to Mummy or to Annette having to exercise it, since they did not go out themselves. They had protested that they would exercise it in the garden, or up in their part of the wood, but he had only given them a thoughtful, dismissing look and repeated that he would think it over.

Mummy said, "Only about school for you."

They both quickened, to the tone of voice as much as to the words—there was a false lightness which alerted them.

"Does he say we must go to school?" Jane asked. "A boarding school?"

"He spoke of it to me at Christmas," Mummy said. "It is quite right. There isn't much now that Monsieur Thiernand can teach you. After all, you are eleven. The brothers all went away to school when they were eight."

"Monsieur Thiernand says he will teach us Latin soon," Joseph said. "He is going to get a book to teach us from."

"You will need more than Monsieur Thiernand's Latin if you are going to be educated."

"Do we have to be educated? Does it matter about us?"

"Yes, it matters. And there is something else. You know Jane has been having worse attacks, and more often. The doctors think she should go to a special kind of school, where she can be looked after properly."

"Joey looks after me," Jane said. "He makes me comfortable and runs for you or Annette to help."

"It's not enough, I'm afraid. There is a special school, in the Engadine, for children who suffer from the *petit mal*. It's very high, much higher than La Jatte, and they have all sorts of things to help make you better. You will be able to learn to ski."

"Perhaps it won't be so bad," Joseph said, "if we can do things like skiing." He looked up, apprehensive again. "Can we share the same bedroom at the school?"

Mummy said: "That school is for Jane, Jocy. You are to go to quite a different school, in England."

They gazed at her, stricken into silence by the enormity of the idea. Then their eyes went to each other, for wretched confirmation and so for comfort.

"You are bound to be upset at first. I know it won't be easy for you to think of being separated. But it has to come. You must see that."

Joseph said, "If you asked, wouldn't they let me go with Janey to her school, even if I haven't got *petit mal*?" He hesitated. "Even if we can't have the same bedroom. Can't we, Mummy?"

"It isn't possible. In any case, Daddy wants you to go to the school in England. And that's a school for boys only. This has to happen. You must try to get used to it."

"Let us stay here," Jane said. "Let things go on as they have done. Please, Mummy. *Please*."

She spoke with desperation; there was a look in her face such as she sometimes had before an attack. Mummy saw it and went to her. She lifted her up and took her to a chair and sat her on her knee.

She said, "We won't talk about it any more just now, Janey. There's all the summer yet. Think of that."

"And at the end of summer," Jane asked, "is that when we are supposed to go away to the schools?" She was trembling violently.

Mummy stroked her arm. "Hush," she said. "No more worrying." She looked toward Joseph. "Joey, I think we could have the Easter eggs today, after all. Run and get them. They're at the bottom of my wardrobe."

Although the subject was not discussed again, they did not doubt that plans were going forward, and little by little they became resigned to the idea; although there were frightening moments when this resignation cracked as, under the stimulus of imagination, idea became reality for a moment and when one opened one's eyes the next bed would be empty and Jane hundreds of miles away, in another strange land. When that happened, the one would fly to the other, and they would lie

together, trembling and weeping, gradually soothed by the loved one's presence into forgetting the harshness of the dream.

When Stanley came, they were prepared to welcome him, even as a representative of all that would soon divide them, in the thought that this first stranger, at least, they would encounter together, still having each other for support. They politely showed him all except the most secret of their possessions and special places and tried very hard to talk to him as they felt he would expect and want them to talk. There were difficulties from the outset.

Stanley said, "Do you mean to say you don't have anyone to play with—no one at all? And never have had? God, I'd go crackers."

His swearing like this was a part of his person—of his largeness, blondness, fleshiness. It did not shock them, but it disgusted them and frightened them a little. Joseph tried to smile placatingly.

"We play with each other," he said. "We're quite happy doing that."

"Are you? I'll bet." He gave them a knowing, sly look and burst into loud laughter.

Both laughter and look made Joseph uneasy, but he could not have said why. He said, "We have some rabbits. Would you like to see them?"

"Might as well," Stanley said. "Lead on. I used to keep rabbits once, but I got fed up with them."

Joseph showed him the hutch, just inside the wood store.

"The gray one is Janey's," he said, "and the white one is mine. We call them Shammua and Shobab."

"Where did you get those names from?"

"From the Bible. They were children of David. It's in First Chronicles."

Stanley laughed again. "Which is Shammua and which is Shobab? I mean, which is the buck?"

"We're not sure about that."

"How long have you had them?"

"Since last year—we got them for Easter last year."

"Any young oncs?"

"No."

"Fifteen months," Stanley said, "and they haven't bred yet? You've probably got landed with a couple of bucks. Or perhaps the climate doesn't suit them. I keep mice. They're breeding all the time. When the does get fat, I take them away from the others and put them in biscuit tins, with soft straw and cotton wool. I keep them there till the babies are big enough to run about. If you don't do that, the bucks will eat them. I had two litters eaten before I realized I had to keep them separate."

Jane turned her face away. "Oh, don't. Please."

Stanley laughed. "I didn't eat them." He watched her averted face and went on. "The Chinese do, you know—eat baby mice. They pickle them in honey and then when they're ready they just lift them up by the tail and bite them off." He made a snapping noise with his teeth. "I wouldn't fancy them myself. You know, with baby mice you can see right through their skins—see all their insides. It looks a bit queer till you get used to it."

Eager to get him off the subject, Joseph said, "Would you like us to show you the wood? You come round this way. Up this path. There's a gap in the fence because they used to bring timber down through this garden to the road at one time. They don't do it now, but the way has to be kept open."

Stanley ran ahead of them up the grassy slope and into the wood. He waited for them to catch up with him and then raced on again. Somewhat to their surprise he had made no comment so far on the fact that they were both crippled. He waited for them again, beside the fallen tree; while they came up the path he pulled at the nacreous growths of fungus that sprouted from the decaying wood.

"There's a stream up there," he said. "Any fish in it?"

"I don't think so," Joseph said.

"Don't you know?"

"We don't go in that part of the wood. We always go to the left here, in among the fir trees."

"The path goes the other way, and it opens out more. What's the matter? You're not scared of it, are you?"

"People walk up there sometimes. They climb up alongside the stream. There's a waterfall. I think you can get round to Champney by the top."



"Well, let's do that. We've got enough time. We can go up this way and come down the other."

Joseph shook his head. "No, thank you."

Stanley asked, "Don't you ever go outside the garden, and this little bit of wood?"

"Only in the motor," Joseph said.

Jane added, "We used to go to the Chalet Russe when Peppi was alive. But we don't know the people who own it now."

"What a life!" Stanley said. "Tied to a bit of a garden and a few moldy trees. I should hate it."

"We don't mind," Joseph said. He looked at Jane, the crossing of their glances reminding them how soon the precious ties might be broken. "We like it."

With impatient scorn, Stanley said, "I suppose it's different when you don't know any better. I couldn't stick it, I know that. Well, are you coming up to the waterfall or not? I'll be with you, so you needn't be frightened."

"We'd rather not."

"Then I will."

He ran from them without a backward look, moving fast, jumping up in the air from time to time in casual strength and vigor. They saw him disappear among the trees, and heard him making some whooping cry in the distance. Then Joseph took Jane's hand and they turned back to the garden. There was security and contentment in doing so, but it was no longer clear and simple, as it had been. The thought of the leaping, shouting boy flawed it, the knowledge that a wall was down and could never be put up again.

Stanley's ideas on what he called evolution affected them in much the same way as his tendencies toward coarseness and snickering. They argued with him because Joseph felt he could hardly permit them to go by default, but they argued with reluctance and distaste and would have been glad at any time to settle for a truce of silence. When Stanley, in his annoyance, turned to abuse and called them monkeys, they were not shocked by the abuse in itself. It took Daddy's intervention, leaning over from the veranda, his face set in the way that terrified them, to

make them realize how dreadfully Stanley had offended, and they were stricken with awe when, at the first demand for an apology, he defiantly turned away. By the time the grudging apology was given, Jane had begun to cry, and Joseph, taking her hand, led her down into the garden.

They were still there, lying on the warm grass, watching a colony of ants that had its home under one of the stones that formed the steps up to the chalet, when Daddy came down and found them. He was dressed in old clothes—flannels, a dark-blue silk shirt—which did not make him any the less formidable.

He said, "Hello, you two. Mind if I join you?"

One of the especially disconcerting things was the way he assumed that, by being at ease himself, he put them at ease. Squatting beside them on the grass, he plucked a blade of grass and lifted an ant with it.

"Funny things, ants," he observed. "I once read somewhere that all the ants in a nest share the same mind—you know, think the same thoughts."

There was silence while they waited for him to continue. When it was apparent that he did not intend to do so, Joseph said, "Did you, Daddy?"

"Yes, I did, Daddy."

The mimicry, Joseph felt, was not harshly meant, but it tied his tongue all the same. Daddy tried to shake the ant loose from the grass, but it remained clinging to it; then he threw it, grass blade and all, toward the hedge.

"Your cousin Stanley," Daddy said, "has just packed his bags and announced that he is going home to England. I've sent him to his room. I've told him that when he's recovered his temper he can come out and we won't talk of the matter again. This will apply to you too, but I thought you ought to know about it."

They merely glanced at each other before, fearing to be charged with some unknown conspiracy, they looked away. The awe Joseph had felt previously deepened as he reflected on the extent of this new defiance.

Daddy said, "That's a soldier ant. See the big nippers he carries about with him? You should study the natural world. You

can learn a lot from it. I suppose Monsieur Thiernand hasn't taught you any biology?"

"Not yet."

"You can't remain ignorant forever. It's past time you had some proper education. Stanley was right in that argument, you know, though he should not have lost his temper."

Once more, making very little noise about it, Jane began to cry. When he noticed it, Daddy said, "What is it? What's upsetting you?"

He was trying to speak gently, but the roughness of tone came through. She continued to weep. He turned to Joseph in exasperation.

"What's making her cry, Joe? Do you know?"

Joseph could not tell, could not even tell that he could not tell. He stared at her, afraid to go to her while Daddy was with them.

"It's been wrong, all this," Daddy said. "It was your mother's choice, and now she's as helpless as anybody." He stood up, the flesh uncreasing around his stomach. "I think you'd better go to your room, too, Jane." He nodded to Joseph. "Tell Mummy I've gone for a walk down to the village."

The brothers were staying at the Chalet des Gentianes. Sometimes Daddy went there to see them, sometimes they visited him at the Edouard; and there were expeditions made by the four of them, to the Valais or the Pays d'Enhaut. They did not often come to the Chalet Fanshawe, and Jane and Joseph were glad of the relief. There was enough to contend with in Stanley.

Since the incident of the insult and the forced apology, his attitude had changed from one of hectoring contempt to a more secret, more bitter persecution. Watching closely for the presence of adults, he turned, at all other times, a blighting, belittling attention on their conversation, possessions, games—not least, on their persons. Although he dealt casual blows at Jane, Joseph was the chief target. When they were sent out to play together, Joseph would see from the expression on Stanley's face that he had been thinking out new gambits for unpleasantness, new ways of twisting the knife. Nor was it possible to escape for long, since

they were, after all, confined to the house and garden and the small stretch of wood and within a day or two he knew every hiding place.

The little advantage they had thought to gain from the situation soon wore threadbare. It might be true that, in Stanley, they were encountering the world, and encountering it together, while they could still comfort one another; but they saw now that the world, as they had thought it might be, was a place of horror. Realizing this, they knew that the one thing that counted was to take what joy they could from the few precious weeks that remained to them. And it was this time that Stanley was filching, these hours that he smeared with sarcasm and innuendo and, occasionally, physical bullying.

And although the time dragged in a leaden apprehension of Stanley's face, Stanley's voice, Stanley's twisting fingers, they could not wish the visit over; for to do that would be to wish nearer that other moment to which the summer's steady march advanced.

Stanley was supposed to be staying three weeks. Toward the end of the first week, Daddy and the brothers went off to the south of France—they would go direct to England from there. Their departure went almost unregarded; there would be no point this year in the usual small celebration of privacy regained.

Instead Stanley, as though released from a deeply resented curb, increased the vigor of his campaign against them. In the new phase of his reign of terror, physical torture and coercion came more conspicuously to the fore. He had a trick of pulling the hair and at the same time digging his knuckles into the scalp which was particularly useful in bringing tears to the eyes, and while he did this, or twisted a leg—he found that he could get a particularly good leverage on Jane's heavy boot—he vilified their weakness and helplessness in that hated voice which, even when dropped to a whisper to ensure that no one else heard what was going on, had an abrasive loudness.

In the afternoon they tried to escape him again; they sat with Mummy and asked if they could stay and read together. But Stanley, moving restlessly about the room, provoked her in the end to say that they should get out into the fresh air on so fine a

day, and that they should remember it was Stanley's holiday. So, reluctantly, they went with him. He led them up the path to the wood and they followed with dumb docility.

"You shouldn't try to get away from me like that," he said. "I'll have to think up a special torture for a trick like that. Come on, we'll go up to the waterfall."

They stopped. Joseph said, "We don't go up to that part of the wood. We told you. If you want to go up, we'll wait for you. We promise we will."

"If I say you're coming up there, you are. I don't mind if we see people. They'll think I'm walking out my pet chimps. I ought to have a little lead for each of you."

Stanley had brought the world to them, but this was something different. In stepping outside their familiar beloved bounds, they would be deserting their citadel, losing the few defenses that still, for a time, remained to them. It must come, and come too soon, but not yet, not now.

Joseph said desperately, "We can't go up there."

"You can if I say it." Quickly Stanley caught Joseph's wrist and twisted his arm behind his back. "Now lead on." He twisted more sharply. "Lead on when I tell you!"

Across the pulse of pain, Joseph heard Jane groan.

He cried, "Jane! Let me go. It's Jane—an attack."

"How would you like a broken arm?" Stanley asked. "Think it might improve you?"

Joseph stumbled and fell, tearing out of Stanley's grip as he did so. Stanley stood over him, ready to throw himself on him, but Jane groaned again and this time he turned round. He stared at her. She had fallen into one of the bushes fringing the path, and it half supported her at a grotesque angle. Her white, rigid face looked up to the arching branches and the spotted sunlight.

"Christ!" Stanley said. "She's having a fit."

Joseph, paying no heed to this, went to Jane and eased her body out of the bush. He sat by the path and cradled her in his arms. Stanley said something else, and then Joseph heard him crashing off up the path toward the waterfall. The afternoon lay softly about them, quiet except for the fluting birds.

There was no need to go for help. He recognized, by such small

signs as the flicker of an eyelid, that this was not a serious attack. He sat and waited and in due course her eyes rolled down and what little color she usually had began to come back into her face. Her spectacles had fallen off, and he replaced these carefully.

In her normal voice, she asked, "Has he gone?"

"He went on up the path."

"Why?" She smiled a little. "Did it frighten him, seeing me?"

"I think so."

"Shall we go and hide before he comes back?"

"I don't think he'll come back right away."

They savored their isolation. Jane picked leaves and twigs off her black stockings. It was for such times as this that they could not wish Stanley's visit over; whatever had to be endured between them, these could not be forfeited.

Jane said, "He must have been frightened. Jocy, just think, we can frighten him that way. I can pretend to be having an attack. That's a way to get rid of him."

Joseph nodded slowly. There was, at last, a weapon on their side, a sling for Goliath.

"He won't know," he said.

"The only thing is," Jane said, "that I mustn't do it too often. If I do, he'll see that we're pretending. But when things get really bad—every other day, perhaps . . . Do you think every other day would be too much?"

But the weapon they had found was never used; by the following afternoon the enemy was gone. Stanley's father arrived in the middle of the morning, and at the first sound of his hard, angry voice they retreated upstairs. They sat on the landing, catching, in fear and fascination, scraps of the conversation—the *bagarre*, Annette would have called it—taking place in the *salon* below.

" . . . my boy to be insulted . . . treated like mud after him coming round and begging it as a favor to have him come out here . . . "

"You don't understand . . . ordinary discipline . . . "

" . . . have to come out here . . . what it costs a workingman . . . not ashamed . . . "

"I think you could have telephoned to us first. . . . no idea . . . perfectly willing to meet the cost."

"Will he take him back with him?" Jane whispered. "Surely he will."

"... for money. Don't owe you people anything and never will."

"... sorry—though I think ... no idea he had written."

"Why shouldn't he write? ... trying to stop that, too. ... motherless boy, and your own nephew. Never again ... shut of you and your lot."

"... unreasonable ... perfectly happy ... child's foolishness."

"... not a minute longer ... coming away with me right off ... get his things."

A door opened, and they heard Mummy's voice quite plainly: "I will ask Annette to see to Stanley's things at once. I hope you will excuse me now."

"Just a minute." This voice, too, was plain and had the harshness that Stanley's had, the same whining anger. "Have you got the rest of the money they gave you, Stan? Give it to her."

Mummy said, "I'm sorry. I'm not prepared to play in scenes of this kind."

"Throw it down on the floor in front of her, Stan. If she won't pick it up her servant will."

They heard the rustle of Mummy's dress as she turned on her heel and went down the hall.

"He is going," Jane said, in a happy, surprised whisper. "We shan't even have to say goodbye. I think. Come on, Joey."

"Where?"

"To our room. We can watch them go, from the balcony."

The plan had been that Jane should be taken to her school first and that Joseph should travel to England several days later. This was changed when it was found that a daughter of one of the members of the Montreux colony would be going to England in the first few days of September, Joseph could accompany her. As a result it was Jane who was taken to see him off, at Montreux station, instead of the other way about.

Dazed by the last swift march of events, their uppermost feelings were of timidity and shyness, of being naked in the presence of strangers, when the taxi set them down and they crossed the lines to the other side. Quite a few people were already waiting

for the London train. They were sharply conscious of the loudness of voices, of the laughter and of the feet stamping, of the quick withdrawing glances as they passed. They were glad it was dark, but Mummy insisted on standing beneath one of the lights on the platform, so that there should be no chance of Miss Treeben missing them.

In fact, Miss Treeben arrived only a minute or two before the train was due. She was a large young woman with curly hair and no hat, and her father accompanied her, a man even larger and more cheerful than his daughter, though redder in the face and without the curly hair.

"So you're sending them out into the world at last, Mrs. Burchall!" he said. "I believe you are a wise woman. It isn't easy, I know, but I think you are doing the right thing."

Miss Treeben said nothing, but laughed loudly, apparently out of high spirits rather than because she had seen a joke.

Mummy said, "It's extremely kind of Susan to take this on. It's a great help to me."

"Not a bit of it," Mr. Treeben said. "She's glad of the company, aren't you, Sue? The Wagons-Lits people were the only trouble—wanted to book them in separate sleepers on account of some fiddling regulation of theirs. I managed to persuade them it wasn't an *clopement*."

This time they both laughed, on distinct jarring notes. Joseph felt Jane's hand creep into his. The grownups were sufficiently engrossed; they managed to steal away, a little out of the brightness of the light, a little out of earshot.

Jane said, "If I write a bit every day and keep it for Sunday, it's still only one letter."

They had been talking that afternoon about the letters they would write to one another, and their mutual engagement to write every day had been gently but firmly rejected by Mummy. They must make the effort, she had explained, to adapt themselves properly to their new lives; so voluminous an interchange of letters would hamper them in this and would also make them conspicuous among their new friends. She spoke that word, they knew, without mockery, however much it mocked them.

"We can keep a diary for each other," Joseph said.



But the suggestion did not lessen misery—a diary of unhappy days.

Jane said, "It will only be fourteen Sundays."

"Yes."

"And there will be Christmas then. And it's not the year the brothers and Daddy come."

He thought of that with a desperate desire, of the snow mantling the slopes of La Jatte, of waking up in the morning and seeing the frost patterns on the windows, of knowing that one only had to turn one's head, to whisper . . . The dream was banished by the warm night air of summer, in which these strange voices echoed and re-echoed. He almost began to cry, but Jane grasped his hand more tightly, and went on in a small hurrying voice:

"I'll take care of Shammua and Shobab until—until it's time for me to go to school. And Annette will see to them after that. I will show her exactly what to do. Perhaps they may have babies by the time we get back. In any case—"

She stopped abruptly. In the dark distance, out toward Territet and Villeneuve, there was the whistle of a train. Their hands clung tightly. There was no time to say anything now. Mummy's voice called them:

"Jane! Joey! The train's here."

This time the bustle and confusion saved him from tears. Miss Treeben lifted him, with a single effortless gesture, into the train and, following after, moved him forward along the corridor with her palms pressing under his elbows. Having established that the porter had brought in and racked their bags, she darted back to the door and occupied the open window. Joseph found himself confined to looking through the fixed windows of the corridor and waving and trying to smile at Mummy and the small figure beside her. Seeing Jane at this elevation and through glass, he had a strange feeling of seeing her for the first time; it was as though he had never noticed before the crookedness of her body.

The train moved, and almost at once they were lost to him, being replaced by the other staring faces that lined the platform. Miss Treeben was still leaning from the window, and calling something. He went back into their compartment and sat on the edge of the bed.

"That's that," she said, when she came in. "I hate all the good-bye business, don't you? Golly, I'm a bit peckish. And no chance of anything till tomorrow morning, and then it's either Continental brekker or uncooked bacon and eggs—can't stand eggs with runny whites, can you? Lucky I've brought some biscuits with me. How about it? Can you go a biscuit?"

"No, thank you," Joseph said. "Not just now."

"Don't mind if I do?" She giggled. "I'll promise not to scatter crumbs in your bedclothes! Do you want to turn in, then? I expect it will be better if you have the bottom bunk—not so much climbing to do. Want a hand with your clothes, old thing?"

"No. No, thank you. I can manage quite well."

"Righty-oh. I shan't look. By the way, if you want the what's-it during the night, you just pull that thing there under the wash-basin." She demonstrated this. "When you push it back again it tips up and empties. Jolly clever, isn't it?"

He undressed and put on his pajamas to the accompaniment of her steady munching. The train rocked on blindly through the night, going away, going away. By now, where would they be? Fontanivent? Chamby, perhaps? He climbed in between the cool stiff sheets, and Miss Treeben turned round to view him.

"That was quick work. You're a fast-moving lad, once you get started. Shall I tuck you in?"

He allowed her to perform her ministrations. Her fingers were large and warm and quite rough against his face. She looked at him with cheerful puzzled eyes as he lay there.

"Everything okydoke?"

"Yes, thank you." He hesitated. "It is very kind of you to let me travel with you."

"What's kind about it? You should see some of the people you get landed with. Hear them, too. Last time back I had an old girl who snored solidly all the way from Paris to Lausanne. I shouldn't think you snore, do you?"

"I don't think so."

She stared at him. "You're a queer lad." She looked away awkwardly, and a trace of color flushed beneath her suntan. "The way you talk, I mean."

She got up from beside his bed and pulled open her case.

"Ah, well," she said, "time I got ready for beddy, too."

She began to strip her clothes off. She showed, once she had turned from him, no consciousness of his presence, and she halted her undressing, when she was stripped to the waist, to wash her face and hands and clean her teeth. The strange sight of her mature, well-formed body, of the muscled back and the rocking curves of her breasts, mingled in his mind with thoughts of his loneliness and misery as, tired by the day and by the emotions, lulled by the train's hammering pulse, he drifted away into sleep.

### 3

THE MICHAELMAS TERM at Paston Hall was not due to start until a week after Joseph's arrival, but the headmaster himself was in residence, and he had told Mummy, when she telephoned him with the suggestion of the new arrangements for traveling, that he would be glad to take Joseph in advance of the rest—that it might, in fact, be a help for him, all things considered, to have a few days at the school before the other boys arrived.

Paston Hall was in Hampshire, in the rolling countryside between Basingstoke and Winchester; the station which served it was Micheldever. Here, on a still, gray evening, Joseph climbed awkwardly out of the carriage and had his cases taken for him by a tall red-haired young man, in his early twenties, who introduced himself, in a quick, rather high, cheerful voice, as Dennis Lynton, the headmaster's son.

"No sign of the porter," he said. "He's probably gone rabbiting. But we don't need him if you can lug that little one. The bus is just outside."

The bus proved to be a red M.C. sports car, and Dennis invited Joseph to climb in. He did so with some wonder, which apparently showed in his face.

"Been in a motor before, haven't you?" Dennis asked. "You've not led as secluded a life as all that, surely?"

"I haven't been in this kind," Joseph said.

The sense of nakedness, of being exposed to curious eyes, had not left him, and each new experience intensified it. As the car growled along the quiet country roads, he crouched down in his seat, even though there was no one to see him.

Dennis said, "I should sit up if I were you. Nothing like a good healthy blow."

The school was basically a country house, of modest dimensions, standing in its own walled grounds, which consisted of a couple of meadows and a coppice. It had been changed only by addition; three extra classrooms and the gymnasium had been added at the rear, and the meadow directly behind the house now held a swimming pool, a fives court and three tennis courts. Of all this Joseph, on the first evening, had only a confused idea. He did not meet the headmaster or Mrs. Lynton, who were out visiting. Dennis handed him over to a servant, a heavily built, slow-talking countrywoman, and she gave him supper and put him to bed. It was a room with four beds in it, each arranged with its head to a different wall.

At breakfast the next morning, Dennis was absent, but Dr. and Mrs. Lynton were there. Mrs. Lynton was of American origin, a lean, muscular woman with a mass of gray hair, penetrating gray eyes, and a somewhat grayish complexion. She had good, strong white teeth, which were well displayed, and a soft drawling voice. She talked a lot during the meal, directing her remarks to Joseph, apparently with the object of putting him at ease.

Dr. Lynton, on the other hand, spoke very little, but Joseph was well aware of his scrutiny. He was about fifty, and in good physical condition for his years. He had a broad face, with a scar on one cheek that ran down to and nicked the side of his black mustache. His hair also was still dark, apart from two impressive white wings that swept back above his ears.

At the end of the meal, Dr. Lynton stood up. He said to Joseph, "We must have a little talk. I think, Joseph. Come with me to my study, will you?"

The study window had a south aspect, which took in the grounds and the extension buildings. Bright sunlight came through it, and so, since two window panels were wide open, did the smells

and sounds of the autumn morning. The air was a little chilled, despite the glare of light. Joseph blinked his eyes against this. All he noticed was a broad oak desk with a swivel chair behind it, celestial and geographical globes, and framed photographs on the walls—chiefly rowing eights and Rugby fifteens, but one or two broad river scenes, with terraced riverbanks and, in one, a high, towered castle.

"Pull a chair up, Joseph," Dr. Lynton said.

There were chairs against the wall on the room's darker side. They were large and heavy, with splayed backs and black leather seats. Joseph could not properly lift the one he chose and had to wrestle it over to the desk. Dr. Lynton watched him.

"Good," he said. "Sit down."

Joseph sat down. He was conscious again of the eyes, appraising, observing, and felt some embarrassment.

"I always have a chat with a new boy," Dr. Lynton said. "In your case, I think it's particularly important." He eased back slightly in his chair. "I understand you are quite an intelligent young man, and your appearance bears that out. I propose to do you the courtesy of speaking frankly and honestly. I think you will appreciate it."

He paused. Joseph said, "Yes, sir."

"I have seen your father and learned something of your background. Your father is a man of strength and determination, but lacking, I feel, in what we call empathy—that is, a sympathetic understanding of the problems of others. It would not surprise me to learn that you feared and resented him. I am not asking you if you do. I am simply pointing out that this would be quite an understandable reaction on your part, and one for which no blame could attach to you.

"Nevertheless, in some things your father is clearly in the right. He tells me that it was your mother's idea to take you and your twin sister to her house in Switzerland, and to keep you there in isolation. He opposed this, but permitted her to have her way. An inevitable result has been that an exceptionally close attachment has developed between you and your sister, so much so, I gather, that even your mother has been, to a considerable degree, excluded from it. There are reasons for this, which I won't go into at the

moment, though it may be useful for us to have a look at them at some future time. For now, I am showing you that we understand you and understand how severe a wrench it is for you to have to leave your sister and come here to Paston Hall."

He stopped and got up from his desk, stepping across to the window.

"Hear that?" he said. "A missel thrush. There is no bird song more delightful." He turned round to look at Joseph again, his back resting against the sill. "Nevertheless, your father is absolutely right in insisting that the break must be made, and made now. Even though you have elder brothers who can join your father in his company, you yourself have a place to fill in society, and for that you must be trained." He paused. "There is a further reason, which I am not permitted to disclose to you. Not doing so, in my opinion, is a mistake, but the reason itself is a sound one. I do assure you, Joseph, that by all reasonable standards, this change in your life was due and overdue. Had it been left for later, it would have been harder—much harder. As it is, it will be hard enough."

Joseph shifted in his chair. The light, flooding over Lynton's shoulders, hurt his eyes.

"Paston Hall," Dr. Lynton said, "is a school for physically handicapped boys. Every boy you meet here will be crippled in one way or another. You will also have noticed that we have our being in the deep countryside. You may feel that this indicates a policy of retreat, of deliberate remoteness from the world. It does not. When my wife and I founded this school, seven years ago, we looked first at the outskirts of sizable towns, such as Winchester. While we were searching, we heard of this house and found it would be sufficiently less expensive to enable us to put more capital into the amenities—the swimming pool and the fives court. So we settled for the country. But you will find that an important part of our life here is made up of excursions to populated places. Our ideal is not the hermit, but the adventurer.

"The successful Paston Hall boy is the boy who has come to terms with his physical disadvantages and has found the means of using both body and mind to the limit of their potential. We have the equipment here, and a very good physical-training instructor,

so that every boy has the chance of reaching a peak of physical fitness. We expect him to take that chance."

Dr. Lynton straightened up abruptly.

"Come here, Joseph. Stand up straight. I want to look at you. Eyes crooked—but eyesight normal, I believe? A little humpback, and the left shoulder carried higher than the right; some torticollis in consequence. Knock-knee, with right lower leg thrown out. What else? A degree of spinal curvature, acquired rather than congenital. Is that a fair assessment, do you think?"

Joseph's embarrassment and shame prevented him from replying. This was worse than anything Stanley had said or could have said.

Dr. Lynton said, "You're not used to this sort of thing? I thought not. Here you must get used to it, and the sooner the better. Until you do, you condemn yourself to timidity, to withdrawal from reality. But once you are honest with yourself, you need have no fear of what others think. Honesty is a personal choice, and sometimes a hard one. You must come to it yourself. Our job is merely to help you to find the way."

There was a week of quietness and comparative isolation, and then, with the arrival of the other boys, life exploded into the noise and bustle against which he had steeled himself. His defense was one of passivity. As far as possible he allowed it to pass round and over him, preserving a mask of silence and indifference. It was this, perhaps, which drew George Ellinger to him. At any rate, George remarked on it at a fairly early stage in their acquaintance.

They had escaped, on a games afternoon, to the fives court. It was a double court, and from the other side of the wall came the thud of a ball and the pad of chasing feet. George and Joseph sat on the waiting bench just outside the central door and looked out at the corner of the field, a few trees and the stone wall that ringed the grounds. They wore trousers and jerseys over their shorts and singlets and had their overcoats on as well; the day was cool.

"Gloves and ball in the court, I think," George said. "It makes our claim to be resting after a strenuous game that much more reasonable."

He took Joseph's gloves and tossed them after his own.



"If we can't have honesty," he said, "let us by all means have the appearance of honesty. That is where you puzzle me, Joe. You are so clearly outside the game. It is not so much that you defeat the objects of Pastonism, nor even subvert them as I do. You look as though you genuinely fail to understand what the whole thing is about."

Joseph said, "Perhaps I don't understand it."

"But what is there in it? *Mens sana in corpore insano*. Let us face our frailties with a smile. Laugh and the world laughs with, not at, you. With the benefits of Pastonism, Quasimodo would have been a happy, unctuous sidesman—possibly a bishop!"

George, apart from being two years older than Joseph, was a bigger and stronger boy. He was physically normal in all respects but one: he had a withered left arm. Academically he was intelligent but indolent, good in the one or two subjects that excited his interest and very poor in all others. He had a thin, smiling face; the smile itself was not a mocking one, but seemed to mask a deeper, less friendly mirth.

"I suppose it isn't so bad here," Joseph said.

"You summon up no kind of conviction to the saying of it. As to that, all forms of existence are comparative. If one has been happy, and I suspect, Joe, that you have, then Paston Hall must offer a miserable substitute. For me, it does well enough."

"Weren't you happy," Joseph asked, "at home?"

"Let me explain. You lived in Switzerland, with your mother and your sister. Your old man, I take it, was glad enough to be rid of you. Being rid of you meant, of course, that you were also rid of him. A satisfactory arrangement all round. My home, on the other hand, is in London—well, Hampstead. My parents are professional people, with very highly developed instincts, both aesthetically and morally. I was their only child and they found me physically disgusting from the moment they saw what kind of arm I had. My mother, by the way, is a doctor—did I tell you that? Being conscious of their duty to me, they neither cast me out nor told me of their feelings toward me. I had to work these out for myself over a period of time and of unpleasant discovery. I *think* they would have kept me with them permanently, as an act of penance, sending me to some such admirable day school as St. Paul's, but I made their minds up for them. I studied the prospectuses of a

number of schools, ordinary public and specialized. And why did I choose Paston Hall? I suppose because, in the country of the blind, the one-eyed man is, if not king, at least a wink or two ahead of the rest."

"But you don't like it here, do you?"

"I would not like it anywhere. Paston Hall suits me better than most would. Pastonism is an absurd and unbalanced doctrine, but, for all I deride it, it fits my mood. Seeing so many of the small monsters here encouraged to take the sane and cheerful view of things enables me to forget to quite a large extent my own useless appendage. And I don't have my parents to remind me of it, of course. In fact, I find that Paston Hall fits me admirably for doing battle with them. I've half a mind, next holidays, to organize a posse of my crippled schoolfellows to descend on Hampstead with me. Just think how brave and understanding they would have to be about it! But not you, Joe. If I put you in, you would break the bold illusion. And in any case, I take it that you are booked for all possible holidays to come?"

"Yes. I'll be going to La Jatte."

"And it can't be too soon? The seconds tick into minutes and the minutes into days. Another month and you will be snug in your Swiss chalet, while blizzards howl around. Well, we've nearly wasted an afternoon on the way."

Term ended on a Thursday, which had generally been the day for Jane's letters to arrive, but there was none that day and there had been none the week before. Joseph had assumed at first that the mail had been delayed by the weather—the newspapers told him there had been heavy snow in Central Europe—and later his increasing excitement over the nearness of the time of his return to La Jatte made the fact of one missing letter unimportant. Letters were something to help the time go by, and now it had almost gone.

Mummy, Dr. Lynton had explained, had written suggesting that she should come to England to fetch Joseph; but Dr. Lynton had vetoed the idea. As he explained to Joseph, self-reliance formed the keystone of the principles actuating the work of Paston Hall, and in the case of such a boy as he, with so much, in this respect,

to catch up, independence of action was all the more vital. Most of the other boys would be taking the afternoon train to London. He was to take the morning train. He should then take a taxi to Victoria. Before joining the boat train he must telephone Dr. Lynton to confirm that all was in order.

Although various excursions had to some extent inured him to contact with the public, this would still have been an ordeal had he not been too excited to be affected by it. Even the embarrassment, on seeing him, of the man who shared his sleeping compartment—a tall, thin man with a gingery mustache and two or three mufflers—did not greatly trouble him. He was up and dressed very early in the morning and stood in the corridor waiting impatiently for the train to burst through to the familiar vista of the lake and the High Savoy.

Mummy was waiting for him at Montreux station. She kissed him and said something about his having grown. He did not speak of Jane straight away: they had carefully compared their schedules in letters and he knew she was to return the day after he did. It was only when they were in the M.O.B. train, with Montreux and the lake shrinking behind and below them, that he mentioned her.

He said, "Mummy, I told you Dr. Lynton likes us to travel by ourselves as much as possible—in public, I mean?"

"Yes," she said. "You don't mind it now?" He shook his head. "It's been my fault, keeping you out of sight all the time. It was just that, when you were born . . ." She looked down at the town, creeping into view from another angle, still more diminished. "I'm still not sure why."

He went on impatiently, "I've been thinking. When Jane comes tomorrow, could I just go down for her by this train—by myself, I mean?"

They would meet in the midst of strangers, excluding all but their own re-encounter. One good thing that had come of separation was that they no longer needed to wall themselves in. Just to be together, unhindered, untroubled, would be enough.

Mummy said, "I didn't want to tell you of this yet, Joey, but I'm afraid Jane won't be coming tomorrow."

The day darkened. On the distant lake there was sunlight, but it was cold, cold.

"Is she sick?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I had no letter from her last week."

"I know."

"Very sick?"

"She can't leave yet. They hope—later."

"She might not come back in time for Christmas?"

"We'll have to hope she will, darling."

"Yes."

He stared out the window. On his side there was only the embankment, rock outcrops, winter grass and leafless bushes.

Mummy said, "I know how much of a disappointment this is, Joey. You must try to bear it."

He did not answer. He felt her looking at him, but said nothing, and after a time she looked away.

He found the letter in her bureau the next morning. He had searched for it deliberately, knowing it must exist. Schools had secretaries, he had learned, and there were always letters being written. This one was in the back of a pigeonhole. Joseph straightened out the stiff folds and read it.

Subject: JANE BURCHALL.

It is deeply regretted that your daughter will not be sufficient well to be returned to you on the date earlier specified. She is retained in hospital wing here and you may be assured will continue to have best and devoted treatment. Medical staff remain here of course without regard to school attendance.

We much regret that treatment initiated has not been successful as was hoped, and in fact that your daughter's condition has made deterioration. You understand that stated treatment was undertaken only in view of the helpless prognosis of your own medical consultants at Lausanne.

Presents for the Christmas may be sent here, but it is recommended only a few and such not likely to arouse great excitement. Visits cannot be granted for the present.

Pray accept, Madame, my distinguished compliments.

ADOLF WILER

Medical Superintendent.

Mummy was in his room sorting out his clothes. He went to her with the letter in his hand. She looked at him in sad accusation.

"Don't you respect the privacy of others now, Joey? Have they taught you that at school?"

"I want to know about Jane," he said.

He had not understood the letter, except as confirming what Mummy had already told him, but, in his misery, he spoke sullenly and his explanation turned into a defiance.

Mummy said, "Come here, Joey."

She had his cases open on Jane's bed. He stood there, fingering the outline of the squirrel worked into her counterpane. Her favorite doll, Poppy, nestled beside the pillow. Jane had not taken her to school, after all. She had left her here, to wait, to keep guard.

Mummy said, "Have you made any friends at Paston Hall, among the other boys?"

"There's George," he said listlessly. "We go around together."

"I'm glad." She paused and sighed. "I wish you hadn't found that letter, just yet anyway—before Christmas."

Details began to acquire significance. "Presents for the Christmas may be sent here."

He said, looking up at her, "Jane won't be coming back for Christmas, then?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Helpless prognosis," he said. "What's that?"

"Dr. Wiler's English isn't very good." She hesitated. "I thought I could prepare for this. You'll look it up in the dictionary anyway, won't you?" She took his hand, but held it as though she were afraid of him. "There was another reason . . . for your being sent away to school. It wasn't just because Monsieur Thiermand couldn't teach you any more."

He stared at her silently, not yet knowing what she meant but knowing it could not be anything good in a world drained of happiness.

"You must be brave, Joey. Jane's sickness . . . we called it the *petit mal*, but although it was like it, really it was something different, something much worse. You know the attacks were

getting worse all the time. The doctors at Lausanne said there was no hope for her. Last Easter they thought she could not live much more than another year."

"We could have been together," he said. "Why didn't you let us be together?"

"For your own good. She was bound to get worse."

"We wouldn't have minded that!"

"And in the end she would have gone, just as certainly. You would have been left then to start everything by yourself. It would have been so much harder. As it is, you've had the letters and—" she shook her head—"I thought you would have this Christmas."

Now he understood; now realization was a mask, blotting out all except the formal grimace of agony.

"You sent her there by herself."

"For her, too. There was a new treatment they were going to try. It had some success in hopeless cases. Only it hasn't worked. You've seen the letter."

"Bring her back. Please, Mummy! Bring her back home."

"I can't. I just can't. It's not possible, darling."

She tried to draw him to her, but he resisted. His mind ran suddenly on their parting, at night, on the station platform. They had been given no chance to say goodbye, and it would not be given now. He pulled himself away.

Mummy said, "Joey. You must be brave. Please."

He went downstairs without looking back, and into the garden. There had been a snowfall, but most of the snow had melted; it stayed in patches where there was shade, translucent, crusted with ice. By the gate he paused. This had been their boundary: within, all that was precious; without, the important, the unwanted things. He put his hand to the latch and pushed the gate open.

At least once in each term the pupils at Paston Hall were expected to make an expedition, without magisterial aid, into the outside world. These could be made singly or in groups of two or three. Joseph and George took the bus to Winchester, on a fine Saturday afternoon toward the end of March.

Posters in the town proclaimed the presence of a fair, and they found it at last in the fields below the Itchen, on the road lead-

ing out to St. Catharine's Hill. Joseph had never seen anything like it; it was his new frame of experience magnified and deepened to nightmare proportions—all the glare and blare, and the hundreds of aimless faces.

"You don't care for it, Joe?" George observed. "How difficult to please you are."

They walked past the side stalls and came to where the big merry-go-round stood. Its brazen voice bellowed a Sousa march, its roosters and ostriches and jerking horses cruised slowly round, as a barker called for trade.

"I went on one of those once," George said, "at Hampstead. Halfway through I began to think one ought to have two hands to keep hold. After another couple of circuits I was sure of it. It slowed down, and I got ready to slide off. Then it started speeding up again. By the time the ride ended I was clinging on for dear life with sweat falling from me like dew."

They drank lemonades at a stall. There were two boys and two girls there, in their middle teens. As they went, they heard one of the girls say, "Look at that couple." There was a giggle from the other.

George said, "Remember, Pastonism has the answer. Laugh and the world laughs with you. And what did we come out here for this afternoon, anyway?"

Joseph shrugged. "It doesn't matter."

"A matter of perspective," George agreed. "And term will soon be over. You have your Switzerland to go to. And even Hampstead is a change."

"I'm not going out to Switzerland," Joseph said. "I'm staying with my father, in Cheshire."

"Are you?" George looked at him. "But you've never been there before, have you?"

"I was born there."

"I meant since then."

"No. I wrote to ask him if I could come."

"You astonish me," George said. "But your mother, your sister?"

"My sister's in a kind of hospital. She's dying. They wouldn't let me see her, anyway."

"I'm very sorry." After a pause George said, "Your mother's still out there?"

"Yes."

There was another pause, before George said, "Shall we push on? I don't really know why we came here. It's not the kind of thing that's rewarding, except Pastonically. We would have done better to go to the pictures. There's Jessie Matthews on at the Odeon."

Joseph said, "I'm glad we came. I've read about fairs, of course. But reading isn't the same as seeing and hearing."

"It isn't the same," George said. "Perhaps it's better." He had been walking on Joseph's right, with the empty sleeve between them, but now he crossed over behind him and put his arm on Joseph's shoulders. "I suppose you haven't been to a circus either?"

"No."

"That's much finer. All the wild animals in cages, and the freaks dancing around to amuse the crowd. Dwarfs with big bottoms and men's beards. There's Pastonism for you!"

On their left was the Dodgems track, almost empty at this hour, with only four cars swerving round the vast oblong floor. They followed each other patiently, banging and bumping, turning away and coming together again, trying to build confusion out of emptiness. For a few moments George and Joseph watched them. The young woman at the cash desk beckoned to them, and George shook his head.

"If they got us out there," he said, "think what fun they would have turning on us. Nothing to stop them. All good fun."

"I don't think they would."

"Try it and see."

They moved away, past the shooting range, past the Whip and the Caterpillar, not yet in operation, awaiting the thicker crowds of the late afternoon and evening. In the distance, above the marquees and the caravans, the curve of the hill was quiet against the sky, crowned with its clump of trees. After the Ghost Tram there were no more big pieces; the fair began to tail out, in side-shows and children's roundabouts.

Joseph said, "Shall we turn back, then?"

"We haven't tried anything," George said. "We must try some-



thing." He lifted his arm from Joseph's shoulder, and pointed. "What about that one?"

It stood near the end, a shabby affair of patched canvas, attended by an old man with red-rimmed watery eyes. The sign said: "HALL OF LAUGHS. Admission 2d. Children 1d."

"What is it?" Joseph asked.

"You'll see."

They paid their pennies and went in. Inside there was an oblong tent, with half a dozen tall mirrors set up at intervals. They were distorting mirrors; in the first Joseph saw his head and upper body fantastically drawn out, the remainder foreshortened into ridiculous squatness. George, standing beside him, was equally grotesque.

"Look!" George said. He began to laugh. "Aren't we a pair of freaks?"

They promenaded from one mirror to the next, flapping arms, standing on tiptoe or crouching down, exhibiting to themselves and to each other the monstrous shapes that stared back at them from the glass. George continued to roar with laughter, and after a time Joseph joined in with him.

"This is home," George said, gasping. "This is the place where all distortions are equal. I wish we could take them back with us."

When they came out into the bright sunshine, they were holding on to each other, still laughing. Passers-by stared at them curiously. They went on laughing at life's great joke, inexplicably revealed in a fourth-rate showman's tent.

They had tea in a cafe and were back at Paston Hall soon after seven. There was a message for Joseph, asking him to report to Dr. Lynton. The headmaster was in his study, reading. He stood up as Joseph came into the room.

"My dear boy," he said, "I have some distressing news for you. Your little sister died this morning. I am so very sorry."

## 4

MORE THAN eleven years later, the echo rang coldly and far away as Dr. Lynton said, "I was so very sorry to hear it. I never met him, but I believe he was a fine chap, and with a brilliant future."

"Yes," Joseph said. "That was quite true."

"As if your family had not suffered enough. Your father has only you left now?"

"Only me."

"Will you be joining him in the firm, do you think?"

"I doubt it. I already have a job, you know."

"Yes. You are a publisher, I believe? You are likely to persevere with it?"

"More likely than I am to go into cotton."

"Yes. I can understand that." Dr. Lynton smiled. His hair was a carefully groomed white all over now, and he had shaved off his mustache; the scar remained as distinct against the well-preserved pink of his cheeks. "I expect to be looking for a home for a book of my own soon. I don't know if you would be interested."

"I would be glad to see it. We're a very small house, though. You might be better advised to go elsewhere."

"The title is 'The Meaning of Paston Hall'—self-explanatory, I fancy. I would regard it as singularly fitting if an old P.H. man were to see it into print."

"We should be delighted to see it."

Dr. Lynton turned, nodding. "The other O.P.H. is also doing well, I believe. As a banker?"

"A finance house in the City. The prospects are supposed to be very good."

"One of the most intelligent boys who passed through our hands, but somehow he never achieved the academic success to which his precociously brilliant brain entitled him. We failed there, Burchall, I feel."

"I hope it doesn't worry you," Joseph said. "George is quite happy."

The conversation was taking place at George's parents' home in Hampstead. His father, a reasonably successful barrister, had recently decided to stand for Parliament in the Labor interest at the general election which, with the end of the war in Europe, clearly impended. This had resulted in an extension and intensification of his already considerable social life. George's mother, Paula Ellinger, the author of two gynecological textbooks and a more popular book on marital happiness, still selling ten thousand copies a year five years after publication, was a vigorous helper. Joseph saw her now, talking animatedly with a tall Hindu and a dumpy woman who had something to do with social welfare. There seemed to be thirty or more guests present, of even greater variety than usual.

"We take our failures seriously," Dr. Lynton said. "We are as concerned for them as we are proud of our successes." He smiled confidentially at Joseph, leaving no doubt as to the category in which he placed him. "We aim for the maximum; nothing less is good enough."

Joseph nodded in polite boredom. He said, "Have you spoken to George yet this afternoon?"

"Not yet."

"Then I think you should. You will be able to make a re-estimation. You may find you got nearer to the maximum than you thought." He saw George, for the moment detached, and called to him. "George! Over here."

When George came, Joseph said, "You remember Dr. Lynton,

of course. He'd like to have a chat with you." He nodded to the doctor. "You will excuse me, won't you?"

George gave him a sidelong look of disgust before submitting to Dr. Lynton's attentions. Joseph moved away with the glass of sherry which, on George's advice, he had got himself from the decanter on the dining-room sideboard. It could do with replenishing. He passed through the crowd, smiling and nodding, and found the dining-room door ajar. He went in and poured himself some more sherry. It was only after he had done so that he saw there was a girl sitting in a chair by the window, looking out at the rain-ruffled garden.

He saw that she was small and dark and dressed in a Wien officer's uniform. Although she must have heard him come into the room, she had not turned around. The indifference was too deliberate to indicate a genuine desire to be left alone.

Joseph called to her: "This is the recommended sherry. Can I get you a glass?"

She looked round then. She ran the usual glance of appraisal and covert pity over him and nodded.

"Thank you. I will have a glass if you advise it."

He found a glass and filled it for her. When he took it to her, he said, "Only the first half dozen ever get introduced. I'm Joe Burchall."

She looked up quickly. "I thought you must be . . ."

"George Ellinger? No, I'm a friend of his."

"I'm Mildred Keyes."

He put his glass down and offered his hand. Hers was small, thin, her grip brisk. He could see now that she was fairly pretty; she had a somewhat Jewish cast of features, the nose a little larger than excellence would have had it, the chin slightly receding. Her complexion was good, and her teeth, like the nose noticeably large, were white and even.

"If you came here to take refuge from the crowd," Joseph said, "perhaps you will let me join you for a while. But if you want solitary peace and quiet, do say the word and I'll leave you to it."

She said, "It's just that I don't know anyone out there, except the person I came with."

"Who was that?"

"Peter Stimson."

"Isn't he a professor of some kind? Science?"

"Physics. He was my prof at Cambridge. He's met someone who shares his passion for Rugby football, and he forgets all but the immediate audience when his interest is roused."

"So you're a scientist, too," Joseph said. "How do you come to find yourself in uniform?"

"The force of patriotic duty. It was either this or industry—one of those mammoth firms with mammoth research laboratories. I thought the Navy might be less restricting."

"And is it?"

"I think so. I'm stationed in London. I have a pleasant enough time, all told."

"In a quiet way."

He was surprised to find himself saying this and thought for a moment it might have offended her.

She looked at him and nodded slowly. "Yes, in a quiet way. I prefer that."

"Do you like music?"

"Very much."

"Would you be willing to come to a concert with me sometime? I hope you will."

She gave him a serious considering look. "I should like to."

"Any preference?"

"Anything that's not too modern."

"That gives me a wide field. How do I get in touch with you to confirm the date?"

"We're in a hotel in Kensington—the Deauville. The number's 3403."

"And when can I find you in?"

"We're working office hours at present. In any case, you can always leave a message for me at the desk."

"I have a better idea," he said. "Since you're working office hours, why not have lunch with me on Monday, and I can tell you what I've fixed up then?"

She smiled slightly, with some surprise. "We're only allowed to take an hour for lunch. Our C.O. is very strict on the hours we keep."

"An hour will be ample. We could have sandwiches in a pub somewhere. Would you like that?"

She nodded. "Yes. Very much."

The door opened again. It was George who came in.

He said, "Ah, there you are. Forgive the interruption. I needed a drink, after Lynton."

Joseph said, "This is Mildred Keyes. Mildred, George Ellinger." He smiled. "She thought I must be you at first since she found me making free with the sideboard."

"A grave mistake, Mildred," George said. "There is no possible comparison between us. I've just been told as much by our old headmaster. You're a great favorite with him, Joe."

Joseph said, "Yes. He was explaining to me that he ranked you as one of his few failures."

"How very true." George turned to Mildred. "Didn't you come with Stimson, the fellow who gets so worked up about the Heisenberg uncertainty principle?"

She smiled. "About people using scientific hypotheses to draw philosophical conclusions? Yes, that's Peter."

George said admiringly, "How extremely well put. Anyway, I believe he's looking for you. He's casting around out there in a lost fashion and refusing drinks."

She glanced at her watch. "I'd forgotten the time. We have to dash off. There's a lecture of some kind."

"I'm sure there is. In Farringdon Street, if not Red Lion Square. Allow me to return you to him, little though he may deserve it."

Joseph said, "Goodbye, then. What time on Monday?"

"Half past twelve, outside the Admiralty. If you're not there, I'll walk up in the direction of Trafalgar Square."

"I'll be there."

He stayed by the window until George came back.

"Quite nice," George said, "as I clearly don't need to tell you." He poured himself a drink. "Don't you find there's a certain special appeal about women in uniform—to us die-hard civilians? I shall miss that part of the wartime scene. But I'm not sure my own preference isn't for the other ranks. All those bright brass buttons on the A.T.S. girls."

Joseph said, "I've often wondered why you stay here with your people."

George shrugged. "It's quite convenient. The saving in money was important at one time, too."

"I should have thought you would have wanted to have your own little niche."

"I do, occasionally. But never enough to feel it's worth the trouble." He crossed to stand beside Joseph at the window. "There they go. How does a Wren like her come to get mixed up with such as Stinson? He's a depressing creature."

"She was a student of his until quite recently." Joseph did not look out the window.

George said, "Ah, university entrance. That accounts for it. I thought she sounded just a trifle *infra* for a Wren officer. Her accent just a shade more *Waafish*."

Joseph said, "I didn't notice anything. I'm not up to these delicate distinctions."

"They're part of life's fascination," George looked at his sherry glass. "Like my reasons for staying on here. You're quite right, of course. It's not a question of trouble, or the absence of trouble. It's something far deeper than that. They rejected me. All that time ago, and I haven't managed to get over it. I really ought to have it analyzed."

"There's no rejection now."

"Good heavens, no! They're proud of me. In fact, they need me. Being an arm short is quite a thing these days, isn't it? And I think they half persuade themselves I'm an amputee, that the little obscene tentacle has ceased to hang from my left shoulder. I have an urge to brandish it sometimes in front of them—to come down in my dressing gown without my pajama jacket and then flourish it at the breakfast table just to test the cozy web of family devotion we spin round each other."

"I don't see that that accounts for your staying on here."

"Don't you?" With his right hand George reached round, slapping himself gently below the left shoulder; it was a fairly common mannerism of his. He laughed suddenly. "Perhaps it all lies in my wild imagination—always has. Perhaps deformity is in the eye of the holder, not the beholder."

"I doubt that."

"The odd thing is that in moments of love I feel I detect a more than natural curiosity. They like to touch it, to stroke and squeeze it . . . I'll spare you the details. At first I thought I had happened on particularly perverse women, but now I'm not so sure." He had a brooding, half-smiling look.

Joseph finished his drink and put the glass down. He said, "I suppose we'd better be getting back."

"Yes," George said. He smiled fully. "Mummy will be looking for us."

When they came out of the Albert Hall it was a warm, breathless evening, still light as a result of Double Summer Time, the sky deep blue except for a few bars of cloud, green and black and red, over Hammersmith. The crowd pushed out, toward the bus stops and the comparatively few taxis.

Joseph said, "It's still early. Do you feel like a quarter hour's stroll in the park?"

"I'd love that."

He steered her across the road and up the slope toward the Memorial. His hand held the crook of her elbow, and then, when this became awkward, their arms and hands linked easily.

"If we walk toward the Serpentine," he suggested, "and then bear back to Knightsbridge gate, I could take you home that way." She nodded. "And you could have a drink with me, on the way. Actually, we're quite near neighbors."

She glanced at him, and he saw that she was puzzled by something rather than made wary.

"Neighbors?" she repeated.

"I live in Knightsbridge. Arnolfini Crescent."

"Yes, that does make us neighbors. I suppose."

She still spoke doubtfully. Joseph changed the conversation to the concert they had just heard, and they talked about it and about music as they walked through the park. She made one or two small errors of ignorance, which he found touching. He had the impression that concert-going was a fairly recent part of her life. When he spoke of the Queen's Hall she was silent, as though ashamed of not having been there.



From the park they cut through the streets to Arnolfini Crescent. As they reached No. 17, he brought out his keys

"Here we are."

She looked at the small brass plaque and read it out: "'Caerleon and Ottway, Publishers.'"

"Caerleon," Joseph said, "died before the war, and Ottway, who doesn't come in very much anyway, has a house in Surrey."

"Have you been here long?" she asked.

"Only two years. They were here already. They came here when they were bombed out of the City. I couldn't have lived over the premises there."

He stood aside to let her go up the stairs.

She said, "I still don't understand, I'm afraid. I don't quite see what the connection is."

"I'm one of the directors," he said. "The working one. Or the harder working one, at least."

They came to the door leading to his flat, and he opened it. Going up the last flight of stairs, she said, "I seem to have been given some wrong information about you. He must have made a mistake."

"Who?"

"Peter Stimson. He said you were something in cotton—in Lancashire."

Joseph took her through to the sitting room. He said, "He was only one generation out. That's my father."

"Then your father is . . ."

"Yes, the cotton Burchall."

"And yet you're a publisher. Have you brothers, then?"

He looked at her, smiling. "Didn't Stimson tell you?"

She flushed. "He said there had been three brothers, but you were the only one left."

"And therefore I must be something in cotton? It doesn't necessarily follow. But his facts are right. He's just slipped up on the inferences."

She sat in an armchair, leaning forward. She had changed out of her uniform for the evening and was wearing a gay red dress, which set off the glossy darkness of her hair, and a black bolero jacket edged with red. Her expression was intent, even dogged.

"Don't you get on with your father?" she asked him.

"Can I get you a drink? Scotch? Brandy?"

She shook her head. "Nothing like that, thank you."

"Coffee?" he said. "Or cocoa?"

"Coffee would be nice."

"Then I'll put the kettle on."

She followed him into the kitchen.

"I do a lot of my own cooking. I find that the rations go quite a long way providing one has three quarters of one's meals out."

"It's a very professional-looking kitchen."

"Yes. You were asking about me and my father." He left a small pause and saw that it embarrassed her. "We get on quite well, all things considered. He would have liked me to go into the firm, of course, but he hasn't pressed the issue. I shouldn't be much good to them if I did go in. It's better to follow one's own . . ." The word he wanted eluded him for the moment. "To do what one likes best doing."

"Not everyone gets the chance."

"That's true. All the more reason for taking it when it does offer, I should think."

She helped him to make the coffee; the scene had a pleasantly domestic air. Then she carried the tray back into the sitting room. It had grown dark, and Joseph switched on the light and drew the curtains. Then they sat, in facing armchairs, on either side of the coffee table. She remarked on the biscuits.

"It's handy," he said, "having Harrods' just round the corner. It seems rather odd that one should get these for the same number of points as any ordinary kind."

"I've never had them before."

"Take the packet back with you, if you like them. I'm not really a biscuit eater. I only keep them for people who drop in."

She said stiffly, "It's very kind of you."

"Not a bit. The packet before last was taken away by the daughter of a peer of the realm—only she didn't wait to be asked." He added gently, "I'm not patronizing you."

The stiffness remained for a while and then broke. She smiled; her face became innocent, like that of a sad child moved to rare mirth.

"You understand things," she said, "don't you?"

"Some things, a little."

"It's all very silly."

"I suppose so. Because something is silly, it doesn't mean it's any the less difficult or unpleasant."

She said, trying to explain, "The Wrens is neither one thing nor the other. A small stereotyped code which you can pick up easily. And the uniform helps. It's a long way from Woolwich—my parents live there, my father works in the Arsenal—but one can manage it."

"And an observation post?" he suggested. "A jumping-off platform?"

She said defiantly, "There wasn't much chance in Woolwich. And at university one mixed with one's own kind. There was little opportunity to do anything else."

"I shouldn't have thought that would be true of a very attractive young lady."

"It was all right providing one was prepared to be seduced with a smile, though even then I think most of them preferred shop-girls. And the road to seduction was a short and direct one. You wouldn't learn much on the way."

"You sound bitter."

"Don't try to understand too much."

"Not if you don't want me to."

He wondered if she had shown as determined a curiosity about the undergraduates she now resented as she had about him—if her ambition to marry out of her class had always been so blatant. It had probably been more so. Experience would have mellowed her to some extent. No, mellowed was the wrong word—smoothed her. But she would never be smooth enough to do what she wanted; there would always be the rough, awkward, earnest edge.

Out of the silence which had grown up, she said, "I'd rather not talk about me. I'm not very interesting."

"I disagree."

She checked her watch. "I must be getting back. Late nights are discouraged, unless one . . ."

She did not complete the sentence, leaving the nature of the discrimination to his imagination.

Joseph stood up. "Of course."

She looked at the cups. "Can I help you wash up first?"

"Not a bit."

He walked her home through the quiet streets to the Deauville, a substantial Victorian edifice across the road from Brompton Oratory. It was quite dark now, and there were places where it would have been easily possible to bestow a farewell embrace with discretion. One of them, in fact, was occupied; there was a dim blur of American and Wren uniforms. They walked past these to the entrance. Joseph shook hands with her, firmly, not lingeringly.

"Till Friday," he said. "Good night, Mildred."

She looked at him curiously. "Good night, Joe."

They fell into a pattern of shared outings, small expeditions. Events took, in fact, their familiar course; and George, meeting Mildred again at Arnolfini Crescent, assumed, in later talk with Joseph, that she was his mistress. Joseph did not correct the assumption.

He felt ashamed, sometimes, of having allowed George to get the impression that he led a life sexually as full as his own. This had started from small things—suggestions not corrected, a misleading smile in answer to a hint—and his part in it had been tacit, George's, explicit. Nevertheless, the picture had been built up and could not now be changed without exposing in himself a pointless pitiable deceitfulness. It was this of which he was ashamed. His friendship with George, growing and deepening over the years, had become important to him, the only human relationship that was important, and it distressed him to think that he was responsible for this nodule of deception which seemed to grow continually, aggregating other things to itself.

It was not that George would have been contemptuous to know that he was still a virgin; he had shown, a number of times, that he was not vain of his own considerable sexual experience—if anything, the reverse. The difficulty for Joseph would have lain in explaining the string of women and girls whom he had had, for varying periods, in tow. It was this explanation which he could not give, and it was because he could not give it that he had permitted

George to believe that acquaintance, in each case, represented liaison.

George said, "She has her charms. A good body. And that air of slight but unchangeable discontent which argues passion. But what am I telling you all this for? You know it already."

"Because you like talking," Joseph said. "Gossiping, in particular."

"That's true, I suppose. I was thinking of taking Lottie on the river next Sunday. Do you fancy making up a foursome, with Mildred?"

"As a matter of fact, we're going down to Aboukir for the weekend."

George looked at him closely. "That's a little unusual, isn't it?"

"I thought she might like to go, and it's about time I paid a duty visit."

"Yes, I'm sure she'd like to go. You're not getting serious, in this case?"

Joseph smiled. "No more than ever."

"She's a determined girl. I admire her."

"Well," Joseph said, "so do I."

Mildred came straight from the office to the train, and so wore uniform. The train was, of course, crowded, and their compartment held an Air Force and three Army officers. Two of these were young men, who did their best to get into conversation with Mildred. She answered them with cold formality and subsequently was flirtatiously talkative with Joseph, in pointed contrast. He was amused by this, and by the officers' contemptuous resentment.

They were fairly late in at Manchester and, since being met by a car was out of the question and any taxis there were had been taken, were forced to take the slow branch line out to Assiton. They did succeed in getting a taxi there, a decrepit prewar American vehicle, and were put down at Aboukir House just before eleven. Joseph's father, they were told by Mrs. Johnstone, the housekeeper, had gone to bed, and there was only time for them to have a quick cold supper before being taken to their own rooms.

Since Sir John went into his office on Saturday mornings, and neither Joseph nor Mildred was up early, they did not meet him until his return for lunch. Introduced to Mildred before this meal,

he received her with courteous interest. She was wearing a dark-green silk dress with a lemon sash. Her own manner, Joseph thought, was a little unfortunate—ingratiating rather than charming.

After lunch, Sir John said, "Do you mind if I take Joe off for a talk, Miss Keyes? I won't keep him very long."

"Of course not," she said. "I can amuse myself."

"Take a stroll in the garden," Joseph said. "I'll join you there later."

He followed his father to his study.

Sir John said, "You still don't smoke, Joey?"

"No. It still makes me sick."

The older man sat down. He had grown heavy in the last few years, as though grief clung to his bones, thickening him and slowing him down. He lit a cigar and his hand was unsteady. His eyes were dull, but direct in their gaze.

He said, "She seems a very nice young woman."

"Does she? I'm glad. But I didn't bring her down here for approval."

"I suppose not. I understood you to say she's in the women's Navy?"

"Yes."

The conversation made no immediate progress. Joseph pulled over a chair and sat down himself. The faces of the brothers looked at him from the walls; all traces of them had been removed from the remainder of the house, but they were much in evidence here. Group photographs, silver cups, Lionel's mortarboard, a riding crop which had belonged to Richard . . . He felt sorry for the old man, surrounding himself with the ashes of a future so different from the one in which he was forced to live.

It was Sir John who broke the silence.

He said, "How are you, Joey? You look well."

"I'm always well, Father." Joseph kept the irony out of his voice. "You know that."

"I wish I could say as much. Pytely wants me to go into the hospital. Nothing serious. Prostate. Age is a laughable business, you know. I suppose I'll have to take his advice. It's damned painful at times, and inconvenient."

"I'm sorry. I think Pytely is probably right, though."

"Yes." Sir John heaved a sigh. "That's not important, anyway." He brought abruptness to the change of topic. "How's the publishing business?"

Joseph smiled. "Plagued, as usual, by a shortage of raw material."

"Of books, you mean?"

"I was thinking more of paper. There's no shortage of books to publish—only of good ones."

"Don't you publish good ones?"

"Sometimes. More often, in relation to output, than some of our bigger competitors. That's about the best one can hope for."

"You haven't tired of it as a profession?"

"Not yet."

"Do you think you will in due course? Any chance of that, do you fancy?" Sir John glanced at the photograph of Lionel, shading his eyes against the sun of some forgotten day.

"Very little chance, I should think. As a profession it's small, leisurely, quiet. It's the kind of thing that suits me."

Joseph put no emphasis into his words; they did not need emphasizing.

His father nodded his head, understanding and resigned. He said, "You're probably right about that, Joey. You know your own mind."

Joseph said, "How are things in your line?"

"Much as they have been for more than thirty years—in decline. They should be easier. You don't have to think for yourself, what the Cotton Control doesn't tell you to do, the Cotton Board will. And there's over a hundred thousand fewer workers in spinning and weaving than there were in the year war broke out."

"The war's over," Joseph said. "There's a new opportunity for expansion, surely. All the demob suits to start with. And then the postwar boom."

"Yes," Sir John said. "All very true. I've been optimistic about cotton for thirty years, but optimism's a young man's comfort. I no longer have the talent for it."

There was another silence. Was this, Joseph wondered, an oblique appeal? He rejected the idea. His father, he had come to

understand, was a devious man, but not in this way. He had asked and been refused, and he would not ask again.

"Do you remember your cousin, Stanley Maine?" Sir John asked. "You only met him once."

Joseph said, "I remember." How strange it was, he thought, that one could look back with the cool precision of memory, feeling only untroubling sadness and a calm regret. "He came out to stay with us at La Jatte, but after a week his father took him home."

"It wasn't a very pleasant business. Your aunt had died. He wrote to your mother to tell her about it; that was when she asked him to go out there. Maine was her second husband, of course. None of us liked him, and he didn't like us. There was always trouble. I didn't like what I saw of the boy either. I thought there was more of the father in him." Sir John looked up. "Do you remember what impression you had of him?"

"Distinctly. He bullied us—Jane and me—the whole time he was there."

"I didn't know that. You didn't mention it to your mother?"

"No, we didn't mention it."

His father looked as though he might be going to pursue this, but he refrained. He tapped the glowing ash from his cigar.

"I've had a letter from him," he said. "He seems to do a lot of letter writing."

"What does he say this time?"

"He's expecting to be demobbed early next year. He wonders if I can give him a job, in Sickert's."

Joseph eased back in his chair. "Can you?"

"I was going to tear it up at first. As I say, I didn't like what I saw of him. But I've been giving it some thought since then. He's Vicky's son, when all's said. And it's not his fault Wilf Maine was his father."

"No blame," Joseph said, "and no credit. But presumably these things leave their mark."

"I thought I'd have a word with you about it."

He said slowly, "I don't think there's anything useful I can contribute."

"You might have some ideas."

This was appeal, of a kind. He began to understand the drift of



the earlier conversation. He said, "It was all a long time ago. He may have changed since then. I should think the best idea would be to take a look at him now before coming to any final conclusion."

"That's the way I came to look at it," Sir John said. There was a fringe of warmth in his voice, which might have betokened gratitude. "I think I'll write him a letter and tell him he can come and see me when he gets out of the Army. That can't do any harm."

"None at all. What branch of the Army is he in, anyway?"

"Signals." Sir John hesitated. "But he appears to be attached to some ENSA unit."

"ENSA!" Joseph laughed. "A comedian, with a line of patter and a funny wig?"

"Well, I can have a look at him," Sir John said. "I'm not committing myself." Joseph saw his glance go to the bright promising faces on the wall. "You'd better get along to your young woman, Joey."

She was sitting on a wooden seat at the end of the lawns. As he came out he saw that she was gazing toward the house, but, seeing him, she turned, as though casually, and as he approached her she was looking across the sunken garden toward the coppice and the fields. She turned and smiled, for once achieving artlessness: a look of welcome and affection.

"Sorry to have been so long," he said. "I hope you haven't been too bored."

"Here? It's a wonderful garden."

"Do you think so? I always feel it's a little too formal. I like nature to be slightly less well groomed."

She said quickly, "I know what you mean." She hesitated, and continued with a touch of defiance: "But this is beautiful, too. I think. It must cost a great deal to keep it up."

He was amused. "Yes, I believe it does. Do you want to stay here, or shall we walk through to the wilder part?"

She stood up quickly and linked her arm with his.

"I'd like you to show it all to me."

"I don't think I know it all. Father has bought pieces of adjacent ground from time to time: there's a home farm, for instance, which has proved very useful in recent years. He bought the bulk of that

in 'thirty-nine and put a man in to manage it. In practical things he's been a fortunate man."

"Why do you put it that way?"

"Because there are things in which he hasn't been so fortunate. His sons, for instance."

"He still has you."

"That's a poor consolation."

"You decry yourself too much, Joe."

He smiled at her. "A weak, self-pitying character?"

"No, not that—not at all that."

A gate at the end of the garden led to the paddock and, lightly screened by trees in one corner, the summerhouse. As they went toward it, Joseph remembered the summer of 1939, the last big house party before the war, how there had been their talk and laughter all over the house and garden, how he had listened and watched and hidden away. Richard had brought his fiancée, Dora—who had married a fighter pilot eighteen months later and been widowed inside six months—and the other two had been accompanied by girls whose names he no longer recalled, only their smiling faces, the lilt of their bodies in summer dresses, their unattainability and their loveliness. Most distinctly he could remember tea in the summerhouse, on a warm, damp day smelling of thunder. His matriculation result had come through by the afternoon post, and the brothers had turned the tea into a mock banquet of celebration, dragging him out of his chosen obscurity, and the girls had made much of him, laughing, touching, their glances, filled with pride and desire, moving from him to the strong, handsome bodies of the others.

The summerhouse had been kept in good condition. He felt a mild regret for that; it should have been allowed to run down, the paint to fade, the wood to fall and rot. There were even cushions set out.

They sat down together; the shade was cool and refreshing. She twisted round, her face against the wood, the curve of her breast an offering.

She said, "It's no good. I can't imagine it."

"What?"

"Having had all this, all one's life."

He corrected her. "I was born here, but I didn't see the place again until I was twelve. I lived with my mother in Switzerland."

"And she still lives there? Is it . . ." She hesitated, showing discretion toward a possible family skeleton. "Has she been there all through the war?"

"She would have had no choice; but in any case I don't think she would leave now. It was her home before she was married."

"Have you been out there to see her, now that the war is over?"

"I haven't seen her since I came back here."

She was silent for a moment, curiosity and discretion in conflict. She said at last, "Have you no plans to see her?"

"Not at present. Switzerland has unhappy associations for me; England has them for her."

She said, "You can be hard, can't you?"

He smiled at her. "When you marry your duke, will you insist on your parents being present? Will you even allow them to be?"

"It's not the same thing."

"To me it's a lesser thing. The justification, I mean."

"You may be right." She laughed ruefully, candidly. "They would have to stay away!"

He was moved. "I like your honesty."

"There won't be a duke, anyway."

Her voice had a transforming edge of wistfulness; now their relationship narrowed down to this instant, to this small channel of time and action, through which, once passed, it could open out to fullness and significance. This was the brink, to which he had come before, the achievement, the small triumph. It was strange that, never having gone beyond, he should know with such certainty that the moment was here and now; but he knew it. He looked at her, his eyes on hers, knowing a deep, fierce, muted joy. In that look, the quickening breath, her beauty and her body put down their defenses; they offered themselves to him, the eyes falling now, the lips parting, to take if he would choose. This was the surrender, the acknowledgment, the one true ecstasy. He savored it, through the long fulfilling seconds, until, as her eyes looked up to him again and she smiled with tremulous encouragement, he locked away the victory and drew back.

"I'll take you on a little farther," he said. "There's the farm. Come and see several years' bacon ration on the hoof."

She followed him. She was confused and bewildered, blaming (as she would be) his timidity and her own failure to cope with it, promising herself that next time would be different. He took her hand as they walked over the warm springy grass, holding it easily as a friend might, or a brother.

There was always some trouble in this postfinal stage, and with Mildred he had thought there might be more than usual. After a stalling week, he invented an engagement to take him up to Scotland for a fortnight and on his return pleaded the pressure of held-over work. She did not try to keep him on the telephone and at a certain point he recognized, by a flatness of tone, a particular stress, that she understood and admitted the change. He put down the telephone with satisfaction and relief. It had been less troublesome than he had expected. There might still be an occasional call, a letter at Christmas, but the way was clear ahead.

He had told her that he was going out that day to visit a printer and would be late in getting back. This was perfectly true: his train brought him into Waterloo just after half past six. He reached Arnolfini Crescent about seven and went up to his flat. Mildred was sitting in an armchair. She was wearing her Wren blouse and navy skirt; her tunic was draped over the top of the ottoman. She was simply sitting, not doing anything. He stood by the door, and their eyes met.

He said easily, "Hello, how did you get in?"

"I came before the office closed. I told them I'd arranged to wait here for you." She smiled wryly. "They do know me by sight."

"I told you I would be back late," he said. "It was touch and go whether I came here from the station or went to the club for a meal. I might not have been back until nearly midnight."

"I would have waited."

"That wouldn't have been wise." He spoke lightly but firmly. "Think of your reputation."

"Damn my reputation."

"Mine, then."

She said, "Joey, I couldn't leave things like that. I had to speak

to you again. I'm sorry. I suppose this is awkward for you." He shook his head. "Distasteful, then. You just want to get rid of me quietly and without fuss—isn't that it?"

"Don't make too much of it. We've had some pleasant times together. We may again. At the moment I'm rather tied up with various things."

"It was when we went to stay with your father that things went wrong, wasn't it? It was all right until then."

Joseph went to the sideboard. "Can I get you a drink?" he suggested.

"If you like. Thank you."

"Gin and French?"

"Yes." She watched him pour drinks for them both. "It was when you saw me at Aboukir House that you thought I was wrong. I didn't fit there, did I? Did your father disapprove of me?"

"If he did, he gave me no notion of it. And it would scarcely have mattered if he had."

She took the glass he gave her. "Joe, please let's be honest. You were afraid of getting trapped into something—even marriage—with someone of a lower class."

"You are quite wrong. That thought never occurred to me."

She flushed. "You can be hard," she said, "can't you? I'll be honest, anyway. It occurred to me. I thought of marrying you—living there, or somewhere like that, some day. But I wouldn't have trapped you. I won't pretend I haven't thought of marrying above myself, even before I met you, but I won't cheat for it."

"That's an old-fashioned way of looking at things. We're all socialists now, remember. And what does not cheating mean, Mildred? Offering your person and services like an honest broker, with a guarantee of fidelity?"

"Please don't be hard. It isn't necessary. I may have had the idea, but I haven't now. I do promise you."

He said more gently. "I'm sorry, Mildred. I'm not likely to marry. That's all there is to it."

"I want you," she said. Her voice was low so that he could only just hear her. "At first I thought I could get over it—I have done before with others. But instead it's got worse. I had to come here today—I couldn't help myself. It's silly and humiliating, but . . ."

She got up from the chair, dashing a hand across her eyes, and went to the ottoman. Her handbag was underneath her tunic. She opened it and brought out a piece of paper covered with her small flourishing writing.

"I even wrote this," she said.

He took the letter from her and read it:

DEAR JOE

I have no designs on you—truly. I thought it might help if I put it in writing. I quite understand that marriage is and always will be out of the question between us. You have made that clear, and I accept it. I just want things to go on as they have been. Please, darling

"I thought you might be afraid of a breach-of-promise action," Mildred said, "and I thought if you had this you would be sure of being safe. I didn't finish it. It's stupid, isn't it? As stupid as coming here and lying in wait for you. But I couldn't help it. I'm sorry, Joey."

He could not doubt her humility, and it moved him. He thought of all the scars there must be to mark the slights, the agonies of embarrassment and shame, which had gone to the making of it. Behind the physical beauty, he saw, there was a small lost creature, but a brave one still. Conscious of the strength of his own defenses, he pitied the weakness of hers.

After giving him the unfinished letter, she sat on the edge of the armchair. He replaced the letter in the handbag and then, standing beside her, put his hands on her shoulders.

"I'm grubby from the journey," he said. "If you can wait while I shower and change, we'll go out and get a meal somewhere. All right?"

For answer she took one of his hands and pressed it to her face. She kissed it, and he felt the wetness of her tears. Then she earned the hand down to her blouse and held it against her breasts.

She said, "I want you so much, Joey. On any terms. I don't ask for anything else."

Acquiescence had been something to strive for—to achieve and then reject. This was something he had never hoped for, never seriously imagined. She wanted him, wanted the twisted body and

the crooked face. Seeing her desperate eyes, feeling the soft rise and fall of her breast, he knew it was true, that this and her humility were a part of the same thing. He had not believed it could happen; and yet a woman loved him. He looked at her, incredulous, torn by fear and joy.

They were married from Aboukir House. None of her relations attended and, apart from his father, only one of Joseph's. This was Stanley Maine, recently demobilized and working in one of the Sickert mills. He wore a hired suit that provided a poor fit, and he talked a lot, especially after the champagne. He was a big fellow, over six feet, and handsome in a somewhat plump, child-like way. Joseph was surprised that his father had taken Stanley on, and thought it was unlikely that he would be kept for long. With those reflections, he dismissed him.

George Ullinger was best man. At the reception after the ceremony, he said, "Well, Joe, no ships' Lynton would be proud of me today—proud of us both."

"Well do e," Joseph said, "thou good and faithful servant"

"And tomorrow, Switzerland," George said. "How I envy you." He shook his head, repeating it. "How I envy you."

"Matrimony is free to all comers. There's nothing to stop you entering."

"Only my little homunculus. Only that I must have women who are not disgusted by it, and their being not disgusted disgusts me."

"Attitudes can change."

"So they can. The things that don't change are the deep inner convictions, the prejudices of the heart, the time someone left the iron standing on the snow-white infant soul. There's eloquence for you!" He looked at Joseph, smiling strangely. "Am I losing you, Joe? Has Pastonism claimed another triumph?"

"Women haven't come between us in the past. And you've been fairly well surrounded by them."

"I don't marry mine."

"I'm more conventional."

"And you, in the past, have not taken yours, married or unmarried, to La Jatte."

"I shan't now. We're going to a hotel in Montreux."

"Only because there isn't a hotel open in the village!"

"And it would have been rather difficult to take my women out to Switzerland during the past six years. There were some obstacles."

"You know what I mean. You know it very well."

Their eyes met. Joseph said, "You won't be sorry, George, if I'm happy?"

"No. A little more lonely, perhaps, but not sorry. You'd better go now. I think Mildred's looking for you."



## 5

**A** YEAR AFTER their marriage Mildred miscarried at three months, and thereafter there were no further pregnancies. He had the impression that, after the immediate shock, this did not disturb her to any considerable extent; she appeared to be busily and happily engaged in social activities and in their shared life. They had bought a small house in Knightsbridge, not far from Arncliffe Crescent, and there she entertained a growing circle of acquaintances. He watched her put on and polish a glossy conventional surface, with all the right catch phrases and mannerisms and intonations. The falseness amused him. When the visitors had gone she was the same girl she had always been, earnest, vulnerable, unsure. These things—the needs, the private poverties—engaged him more deeply as the years passed; these and his own swelling need for her.

George Ellinger remained a member of their circle but, increasingly, a distant one. Their domesticity, Joseph thought, and his own contentment in it, was an irritant which grew rather than diminished. It provoked George to sardonic comment which Mildred, although she put a good face on it, naturally enough resented. Nor were matters helped by George's continuing series of women. His discrimination, so far as these were concerned, gave

the appearance of becoming a negative factor: many of them were unpleasant and some impossible.

As a result of all this, Joseph tended to see George at rarer intervals, and their encounters became casual and of short duration—a lunch together once a month, a meeting and an hour's talk occasionally in a pub. Joseph regretted the change, but with the mild regret associated with events that cannot be altered by intervention and that arise, in any case, out of a compensating, a greater happiness.

This did not surprise him, but something else did. It was the arrival and persisting appearance in their lives of Stanley Maine. He had moved, after no more than six months of practical work in the outlying mills, to the main office in Manchester, where, in due course, the post of personal assistant to the chairman and managing director was created for him. In this position he contrived to pay frequent business visits to London and was assiduous in his calls at Long Terrace.

Mildred liked him; Joseph, although he did not at first and came gradually to nothing better than tolerance, was doubtful of his motives in the matter. There was little but the mainspring of identity to link the adult Stanley with the grotesque young bully of La Jatte; and even for the bully there might have been something to be said if more had been understood. But even to know all, he felt, would have been to forgive only in part. There had been three people involved, not two.

He could see plainly enough why Mildred found him pleasant and amusing. He had an actor's gift of conveying sincerity, an ability to express opinions opposed to those of the company in which he found himself, forcefully, entertainingly, and without giving offense. He was articulate, but not glib. When something roused him, he spoke quickly and carelessly. His laughter was not studied; he laughed easily at his own jokes.

On the other hand, quite apart from his instinctive prejudice against Stanley, Joseph felt that he was not altogether trustworthy. It was the business of the trips to London which brought him to this view. He had felt from the start that Stanley had other interests there, apart from those of Sickert's, and in due course he learned what these were. Stanley, it seemed, had retained his

theatrical connections; he was involved in a theater workshop group in Manchester, acting, producing, writing. He visited London, Joseph gathered, as much on behalf of the theater group (and in pursuance of his own interests in that direction) as of Sickert's, who footed the bills.

From early attempts at concealment, Joseph guessed that Stanley had been afraid he might say something to his father. Later the concealment was perfunctory. Joseph was not sure whether this was due to Stanley's realization that he would be most unlikely to communicate his knowledge, or to a confidence that he could explain or justify his position if called on. It might even be, though this seemed unlikely, that his father was aware of what was going on and had given actual or tacit consent.

When Joseph and Mildred visited Aboukir House, Stanley was likely to be present for part of the time at least. He had a flat in the center of Manchester, but a room was kept ready for him at Assiton and many of his personal belongings were there. He was not obtrusive about the place and generally—at any rate when they were there—managed to be out in the evenings. He had bought a sports car for shuttling to and from the city.

Although he was accustomed to this, Joseph was surprised to find him there for Christmas one year. He commented on it to his father. They were sitting round the fire on Christmas Eve—Joseph, Mildred and Sir John. They had been listening to the wireless but had now switched it off and sat in a warm comfortable silence, broken by the distant sound of wind, the subdued tick of the wall clock, and their own easy voices.

Sir John said, "You don't mind him being here, do you? That little flat's a miserable place for a Christmas. I asked him to come over."

"I never quite gathered what happened about his father."

"He's still in the same place." Sir John nodded his head once or twice. "He calls the house 'The Chalet.'"

"You haven't seen him again?"

"No."

"But he knows Stanley is working for Sickert's now?"

"As far as I know."

"And he doesn't mind that?"

"That's between him and Stanley."

There was some complacency in the way he said it. Could he be deriving satisfaction, Joseph wondered, from a prospect of alienating Wilf Maine's son from him? There had been a deep antagonism between the two men, which presumably survived.

As though aware of a possible criticism, Sir John said, "He doesn't neglect his father. He goes down there from time to time."

"But not at Christmas?"

"Not this Christmas. There's a reason for it. He has a job down your way early in the new year. He'll have New Year at Ashbridge and then see to the London business on his way back. It saves a journey. His father isn't bothered about Christmas as such, anyway. He's one of the old-style radical atheists. At least, he used to be, and I don't suppose he's altered."

Mildred had turned to a bowl of nuts on the little table beside her. She began cracking them, carefully and neatly, putting out the shelled kernels in rows. She said, "We ought to invite him to stay with us when he's in London, don't you think? We have more room than we know what to do with, and he's your cousin, after all."

"He may prefer hotels," Joseph said.

"That's not much of a compliment to my housekeeping."

Joseph smiled. "I meant from the point of view of feeling freer to do what he likes."

"Well, good heavens, we wouldn't tie him down to a program or anything."

"He might feel tied, all the same."

"I doubt that," Sir John said. "He's happy enough to come and stay here. He's a bit more sociable than you are, Joe."

"Then I shall ask him," Mildred said with decision. "He doesn't have to accept if he doesn't want to."

"Where is he tonight?" Joseph asked. "Did he say?"

"Some young woman," Sir John said.

"Do you know," Mildred asked, "or are you guessing?"

"I'm guessing about tonight. I'm pretty sure there is one in the background. It would be surprising if there weren't one, surely."

"I can imagine what kind," Mildred said.

Sir John said, "I don't see that follows."

"Mildred has a poor opinion of the male taste in women," Joseph said.

"If your pal George is anything to judge by . . ."

"I don't think Stanley is much like young Ellinger," Sir John observed.

Joseph shook his head. "Nor do I."

"Anyway, not all men," Mildred said. She took some of the nuts and offered them to him, smiling. "I think there are exceptions."

Stanley very willingly accepted the invitation to stay at Long Terrace during the time he was in London. New Year's Day was on a Wednesday, and he came up on the Thursday in time for lunch.

During the meal, after expressing his gratitude for the hospitality, he said, "I hope you two haven't anything on this evening. I've got a couple of tickets for *Oklahoma*. I was supposed to be taking out a French buyer, but he's decided to stay in France."

"A couple?" Mildred said. "What about you?"

"I can see it some other time. It doesn't look as though it's coming off just yet."

"Isn't there someone else you could take?" she suggested.

"Not a soul at this notice."

"Take Mildred," Joseph said. "I can't really spare this evening. There's a tremendous accumulation of scripts on my desk."

"Let them wait," Stanley said. "Who minds about authors?"

"Publishers do. They have to."

Stanley turned to Mildred. "Well, madame? Can I escort you to the theater tonight?"

"I'm sure you could find someone else," Mildred said.

She was eager for the treat, Joseph saw. He said, "Pay no attention to her, Stanley. She'll be glad to go with you."

It was just after eleven when the taxi set them down outside the house. Joseph came out of his study into the hall to let them in.

"Did you have a good time?" he asked.

"Marvelous!" Mildred said. She chattered about the play as they went upstairs to the drawing room.

"It sounds as though you enjoyed yourself," Joseph said. "Would you like a drink?"

Mildred nodded. "A brandy."

"What will you have, Stanley?"

"I'm going to beg to be excused," he said. "I didn't have a great deal of sleep last night, and a good deal less the night before. And I'm seeing someone at nine tomorrow morning."

Mildred smiled in dismissal. "You know your room? Do you have to go far for your appointment?"

"Just off Park Lane."

"Five minutes in a taxi. Breakfast at eight all right? Thank you for the evening, Stanley."

After he had gone she roamed restlessly round the room, at first singing snatches from the show. Joseph poured himself a whisky and sat on the sofa with it. Mildred had furnished the room in the new Victorian style, and the sofa had a high curved back and had been recovered with a dark-blue plush edged with crimson brocade. The matching domes of wax fruits and flowers on the sideboard were her latest find. She looked at them, humming "The Surrey with the Fringe on Top," and then came and sat beside him.

"He's not such bad company," she said.

"Stanley? I didn't think he would be."

"He can enjoy things and still be intelligent about them. The show tonight, for instance. He was analyzing it—the strong and the weak points, the production, acting, singing. I can't remember the details now, but it was all very professional."

"Well," Joseph said, "he's a man of the theater."

"No, quite seriously. He's writing a musical comedy himself. I think it might be good. He might have a real talent."

Joseph said, "There's nothing like attending a performance of a successful play for making people think they can do the same. I've even thought so myself."

She shook her head. "I'm convinced he has talent. I don't know why he's wasting his time in Sickert's."

"For what it pays him. It's quite a good reason."

"I suppose so."

"He would have to be an American to hope of making money out of writing musical comedies; and even there the competition is fairly fierce."

"Stanley was saying that the old kind of English musical comedy is dead. He thinks it can be made more contemporary—dealing with real life. He has a lot of ideas about it."

Joseph smiled. "He seems to have found one disciple, at any rate."

"You're being unfair." She spoke with slight aggressiveness. "You shouldn't remain prejudiced against him because he happened to be a bit of a brute when he was eleven or twelve. Most boys of that age are."

"You're probably right."

Her voice changed. She said, "Joey darling, I do wish you had come, as he suggested at first. I don't really like going out except with you."

"That's not very gracious to Stanley."

"You're the only one I want to be gracious to."

She got up and moved around with small dancing steps, humming the melodies. When she came back to him she knelt beside him, looking up, her eyes bright, her lips slightly parted. She was wearing a low-cut evening dress with a stiffened blue silk corsage in which her breasts were cupped, white and tender. Her hands sought for his, put them to her face, drew them down.

"Darling," she said. "I'm glad he went to bed early. He is quite nice, whatever you say, but I'd had enough of him for one evening. I love us being on our own together, like this."

He lifted her to sit beside him. She turned her head and they kissed.

She asked, "Do you love me?"

He had always disliked the question and its necessary response; between them they limited and defined the illimitable. She never noticed the awkwardness.

He said, "I love you truly."

"Kiss me again."

Her tongue moved. One of her hands tightened on his hip.

He said, "Shall we go up to bed?"

"No." She shook her head with her mouth fastened to his. Her body arched. "Undo these buttons. Joey darling, love me, love me!"

It became usual for Stanley to stay with them when in London. Joseph made further efforts to like him and found that, to some extent, he was succeeding. He had undeniable good qualities—intelligence, enthusiasm, a freedom from cant—and his passionate interest in the theater made Joseph wonder sometimes if Mildred might not have been right in thinking he could succeed eventually in that field. But although there was a good deal of talk and superficial activity, nothing positive seemed to grow out of it. He was still in Sickert's, still Sir John's personal assistant. On the whole, Joseph felt, he had been right in classing him as a dabbler.

But that year he was less concerned with Stanley than with his mother. Since their honeymoon trip, he and Mildred had gone out most years to Switzerland and spent part of their time there at La Jatte. They stayed with Katharine at Chalet Fanshawe. She greeted them with moderate interest when they came, and she bade them goodbye at the end of their stay with no apparent concern. As far as could be seen, she lived a self-contained and contented life.

Lately, however, there had been an odd strain in her biweekly letters, a disconcerting inconsequence of thought and an occasional confession of weakness which was alarming in its openness. They had planned to visit La Jatte in August, but in June Joseph was telephoned by his father. The call came through just after nine o'clock, and he had not yet left for the office. He took it at the breakfast table, with Mildred making inquiring faces on the other side.

"I've had a letter," Sir John said, "from a man called Lucas-Spiller—he's the vice-consul at Vevey."

It could only concern his mother. Joseph asked, "Something wrong with Mummy?"

"It's a bit difficult to make out. It could be nothing at all. Depends what kind of a fellow Lucas-Spiller is. He's very anxious not to alarm me."

"But she's ill?"



"I don't think so. It sounds as though she may have gone a bit eccentric." The voice at the other end of the line sounded tired. "There wouldn't be anything alarming in that. We all get funny as we grow old."

"He doesn't say exactly what?"

"No."

"But it's serious enough for him to write to you about it?"

"He may be an alarmist. He reads a bit that way."

Joseph said, "I'd better get out and see how things are, hadn't I?"

"It would be a help if you could, Joe. I'm up to my neck in it at present, and I'll be without Stanley for the next week. Can you manage it?"

"Don't worry."

As he put the receiver down, Mildred said, "Your mother? Is it urgent?"

"I don't know. There's no point in delaying, though."

"Flying?"

"If I can get a seat."

She rose from the table. "I'll go and pack for you right away."

"Can you come, too?"

"Joey darling, but how? We've got all sorts of things and people we'll have to cancel—someone had better stay behind and make the excuses. And we mustn't squander the travel allowance if we want to get out again in August."

He could have pointed out that the foreign currency allowance was hardly an issue in view of his mother's Swiss account, and that his secretary could deal with the broken engagements; but he understood the deeper reluctance. Mental illness scared and upset her.

He said, "You're quite right. Just throw me some things together."

"For how long?"

"It might be a week."

She made a small face. "It can't be helped. Let me know when you're due back, so that I can meet you."

"I'll telephone."

Circumstances, however, prevented him from keeping that promise. The telephone had been cut off at Chalet Fanshawe and

he thought it simpler to telephone in the evening from Montreux; he had not been able to get a last-minute plane vacancy and so was traveling by train. But at Montreux he found that, owing to line trouble following thunderstorms, there was a four-hour delay on calls to England. It was not until he was preparing for bed in his sleeper, with the train rocking through the emptiness of night, that he remembered he could have sent a cable for delivery the next morning, and he was surprised that he should have failed to think of this. The thought worried him a little, more than the failure to get in touch with Mildred. He had a compartment to himself and sat on the bed for some time after he had undressed. It was an old carriage; it might have been the identical one in which he had first traveled to England. From pondering his own stupidity, his thoughts went to Susan Treeben, and the sight of her near-naked un-self-conscious body revealing itself to his boyish eyes. He wondered into what paths her life had moved, and was sad for a moment that he would never know.

He telephoned the house from Victoria and heard the call ringing out monotonously, without reply. He wondered at first if he might have got a wrong number, but then realized that it was the maid's afternoon out—presumably Mildred had gone out, too, on one of her social occasions. Having lunched on the train, he had the choice of going home or going direct to the office. He chose the former, as it would give him an opportunity to pick up some material that was needed.

In Long Terrace there were two rooms on the ground floor, the dining room in front and Joseph's study behind it. He went to the study to get the stuff for the office and found among it a typescript for which a fairly urgent decision was required. It was a political work, slightly out of the Caerleon and Ottway line, but he felt he ought to glance over it himself rather than take the reader's word for its unsuitability, and he could do that quickly and more easily in the quietness of his study than surrounded by the activity and interruptions of the office. He sat down and began to read it.

When he heard the door open, he knew it must be Mildred, but he did not get up to greet her. She would have to go past the open door of his study, and he would call to her then, sur-

prising her. Her steps advanced a little along the hall, and stopped. She called, "Come on!" and Joseph understood that someone had come back with her and had been delayed, perhaps by paying off a taxi.

It was with no conscious motive that he sat very still, his hand flattening the pages of the typescript on the desk before him. The footsteps came on again, Mildred's and the heavier tread of a man. They moved together and he heard her giggle softly. As they came into the slanting frame of the doorway he saw that it was Stanley—that Stanley was walking behind her, their bodies almost jostling, his hands stroking her neck. At the foot of the stairs they stopped.

She said, "Darling, I can't go upstairs with you holding on to my neck like that!"

Stanley said, "I can't take my hands off you. Except to put them somewhere else."

She had half turned to speak to him. His hands came down from her neck, lightly covered the curve of her breasts, fastened themselves on her hips. They stayed like this a few moments. Suddenly she twisted round, breaking his hold to offer herself to him the more completely. She gave a deep sigh.

"Love me!" she said.

It was Stanley whose glance, going over her shoulder, found Joseph's watching eyes. His hands, which had moved to claim her, dropped to his sides. Out or loss her own hands reached for them. Then, as he made no response, she turned and saw Joseph.

"She's a woman," George Ellinger said, "and a bitch. The two things go together. That's a premise of my shallow and cynical philosophy. But I will moderate my comments. You hate her now, but tomorrow may be different."

"I don't hate her now," Joseph said.

They were in a bar not far from George's office in the City; Joseph had gone up there because he did not feel capable of facing the people at his own office and there was nothing else he could think of doing with the afternoon. By the time he found George it was five o'clock, and the suggestion of going for a drink was inevitable. It was a long bar, with giant casks on one side and

a disused gallery on the other. There were only two or three others present when they went in, but there was a steady augmentation of men fortifying themselves for the homeward journey to the suburbs. They carried umbrellas and briefcases, and they opened the *Evening Standard* at the City page.

"Cuckolding a cripple," George said. "It's a capital offense in my penal code, but admittedly I'm prejudiced. And perhaps mutilation would be a more appropriate punishment." He shrugged. "It's no good, Joe. I loathe her. I always have."

Joseph said, "What am I going to do, George?"

"Do you really want to know?" George sounded excited. "For the immediate future—for tonight—come and raise hell. I can lay on a couple of superbly bodied cows who will demonstrate their engrossment in the delights of love as well as any bitch of a wife could."

"Thanks." Joseph smiled, with some strain. "But I've told them I'll see them at seven."

"A master stroke," George said. "You don't turn up. Let them sweat."

"I wasn't thinking of tonight."

"It's a pity they spotted you. It would have been much simpler if you'd been able to telephone for a couple of those men in bowler hats and had them creep upstairs in their stocking feet. As it is, you haven't really got evidence. On the other hand, cousin Stan won't want a family scandal, will he? You have him over quite a sticky barrel. He'll have to take her off your hands if you make an issue of it. As for her, pay her. It will be worth it."

"And then?" Joseph said. "And then?"

"The world is so full of a number of things. Good God, what has she ever given you? Not even a child, and nothing else another woman couldn't do better. Forget about her. I'll guarantee you won't be lonely."

A plea underlay the heartiness and the urging. They were to salve each other's loneliness, as they had done before in the brisk melancholy days of Paston Hall. It was neither sympathy nor the pleasure of justification which moved George, but hope. A companion again, to walk with through the Hall of Mirrors, where all distortions were equal.

Joseph said, "There are different kinds of loneliness."

"If you take her back," George said, "do you think that will work?" He spoke sharply and with passion. "How long will it be before she comes on heat again, and how will you ever be certain that she hasn't managed to trick you without your knowing? It was a bit of bad luck that she got caught out this time, wasn't it? In future she'll be more careful. You'll know that and so you'll watch her. Whether you want to or not, you'll watch her. Do you think it's worth it—to watch like that, never knowing what you're going to see in the next keyhole?"

He had lost his customary suaveness. Joseph saw that his pleading, as he saw that it would fail, became plainer, more explicit. In his own misery, he found he could be sorry for George as well. He emptied his glass.

"We'd better have another drink."

"For God's sake, Joe," George said, "don't be a fool. Do you think she married you for love, with your kind of body? Do you want to be exploited, kept for your money, and the title in due course, tittered at behind your back with anyone who can help her for a few hours to forget what her husband looks like? Is that what you want?"

"Let it go, George," Joseph said. "You're hurting yourself, not me."

The house was quiet and seemed empty, and he was a little surprised to find them in the drawing room; he thought they might have gone, insolently ignoring him, deep in the preoccupations of their new life together. But they were there, discreetly apart. Stanley was sitting in an armchair, with an ashtray beside him full of ash and ends, and Mildred was standing by the window. She was pale and looked nervous, afraid.

He said, "I'm sorry about doing things this way. This afternoon . . . I just wasn't up to it."

Mildred said, "Joel!" He looked at her. "I just want to say that there—hasn't been anything between Stan and me. I haven't been sleeping with him. I want you to believe that."

He said, "And do you think, if I hadn't been there, virtue would

have risen up this afternoon and at the last minute kept you pure?"

The scene, he could tell, was present in their minds, as it was in his. Stanley stubbed out a cigarette. A faint blush laced the whiteness of Mildred's cheeks. She was wearing a simple black dress and the effect was becoming.

"I went away," Joseph said, "to try to make up my mind what I ought to do. It was rather silly. There's nothing I can do. What happens is in your hands, not mine."

They watched him, saying nothing, and he wondered with a pang of bitterness what the conversation had been which had stopped when his key turned in the door downstairs.

"In your hands," he repeated. "If it's love, you will want to have each other completely. I can understand that, and I don't want to stand in the way of it. There need be no difficulty there."

He was standing facing the model, in a glass case, of some South American ranch. Tiny blinds shielded sightless windows from the sun and miniature cows were herded by ragged dolls in the foreground. In the gardens, fruit was dusty on the trees.

"If it's just a passing whim," he went on, "the ordinary routine of lust, I don't imagine you will want to make it permanent. In that case, I suppose the only thing to do is for us all to forget about it, as soon as we can, as well as we can."

Mildred said unbelievably, "You'll take me back?"

He said slowly, "By my own choice, I could never let you go. I thought you understood that. Not even if this afternoon happened twenty times."

Stanley said, "Don't try to be magnanimous." His voice rose. "She's a free woman, anyway."

Joseph ignored him. He said to Mildred, "I haven't had a chance to tell you about Mother yet. She's gone a little mad—that's the only way one can describe it. She won't leave La Jatte, and if she's left there on her own, without adequate care, the Swiss will probably certify her and put her in an asylum. She won't have a trained nurse; physically she's still very capable. I've made up my mind to go out there and stay with her."

"But what about the firm?"

"Ottway will have to get someone else in."

She said, "You mean—sell everything, go to live at La Jatte?"  
"Yes."

Stanley said, "So that's the punishment? Take her where she won't be exposed to temptation—lock her up in a Swiss village?"

"It has nothing to do with this afternoon." Joseph still addressed himself to Mildred. "I have no choice really. I hoped you would be willing to come out with me, but of course I couldn't insist."

Stanley said, "Your mother could be made to have a trained nurse. You want to hide, don't you? And hide Millie with you."

Joseph said, "Talk it over between you. I'm going down to my study." He looked at Mildred. "I love you, whatever it is."

He made no sign to Stanley as he left. In his study he closed the door and went to his desk. He sat there, a book open before him but unread. From above came the faint tremors of voices. They seemed to go on for a long time. At last he heard footsteps on the stairs, a man's heavy impatient tread. They went along the hall, and the door opened and slammed. He got up then, to go to Mildred. Her head was bowed, and she was crying. Sadly he wiped away her tears.





# FOUR



# I

RATHER more than a year after Stanley went to work at Sickert's, a touring company played a brief Elizabethan season in Manchester—which meant, in fact, *Dr Faustus*, *The Duchess of Malfi* and the rest Shakespeare. There were four women among the players. The youngest, Pamela Mentish, was a full-bodied rosy girl with pretty, undistinguished features and a turban of bright blond hair. The second Sunday they went out together, after a relatively decorous afternoon in the country he suggested dropping in at his flat before going on somewhere for the evening. She agreed, he thought, almost too readily, the show of innocence was a little too obvious to be real, but that did not mean she would not play the part through to the end. On the way back she chattered inconsequentially about theater in general and the rest of the company, displaying neither tension in herself nor any awareness of his. She bounced out of the car when he stopped, wrinkled her nose at the building and commented that it looked very nice, for Manchester.

Inside the flat she smilingly evaded his attempt to kiss her and walked around, examining and appraising, like a child in new exotic surroundings. He followed her, yearning and unsure. She peeked into the kitchenette and was surprised to find it tidy, and into the bathroom and said how that was the thing she most loathed about touring—never having a private bathroom.

Whirling toward him in a way that encouraged no approach, she said, "Do we have much time before we go out again? Half an hour?"

Trying to avoid sounding sulky, he said, "As long as we like."

"Half an hour will be ample. I'd like to wash my hair. I washed it on Tuesday, but heavens, Manchester . . . ! And the bathroom at our digs is absolutely loathsome. The washbasin's been broken and someone has mended it with cement—dirty gray and *gritty*. And the water's never properly hot."

"You can do it here if you like." There was an intimacy in prospect, at least. He could offer to help, perhaps—soap her hair for her. "You can have the water as hot as you want it. Boiling, if you like."

She closed the door behind her and he did not at first attempt to follow her in. It was not until some minutes later, when he could hear the sound of water running, that he knocked on the door.

"Can I come in?"

Her voice in reply was muffled. "If you want to."

He turned the door handle. "You must have slipped the bolt."

"Did I? I suppose I did it automatically. Then you'll just have to wait, Stanley."

"You can unslip it."

"Not possibly, my sweet. I'm soaped up and practically blind. This is a major undertaking."

"I thought perhaps I could help you. I think I'd make a good shampooer."

"Terribly kind of you, but I can manage. I'm used to the terrain. Sit down and smoke a cigarette. I promise I won't be very long."

His suspicions, by now, were fully active. She was not going to yield anything and she was going to get the maximum satisfaction out of twisting his arm. He had met girls of this kind before. She probably wanted to provoke him into starting a scuffle, but one in which she would hold the initiative and in which, for no pleasure at all, he could be made to look silly. He sat down on the edge of his divan, lit a cigarette and decided he was going to disappoint her by refusing to play.

He did not look up immediately when the bolt drew back and the door opened.

She said softly, "Poor dear. You do look sad."

She was wearing two of his towels, one round her head and the other round her body; her legs, arms and shoulders were bare. As he stared at her, she said, "I always have to strip down to wash my hair—there's so wretched much of it. I would have had a bath as well, but I thought you might be getting impatient. Were you getting impatient, darling?"

She watched him, smiling, gently biting her lower lip as he walked toward her. He put his hands on the soft warmth of her upper arms. The towel was loosely knotted above her breasts; lower down it gaped open at one side to show the white curve of her hip. He put a finger between the knot and her feathery skin, pressed for a moment, and pulled it free. The towel dropped to the floor. He looked at her, not moving, only his eyes searching, delighting.

"Is that the way you were going to help me?" she asked. "I thought so." She lifted her arms sensuously, putting her hands to the back of her head. "I suppose I shall have to take the other one off myself."

She pulled off the other towel and shook her head vigorously. Her hair fell down in thick masses of damp curls, reaching below the full breasts to the hollows of her waist. She put her hands down, rubbing it, pressing it against her. "Sometimes it's a nuisance," she said, "but I feel it's worth it." Her fingers lifted a heavy strand and dropped it. "It used to be longer, but I had it cut short. Then I couldn't bear it and grew it again."

She looked up into his watching face and smiled.

"You look strange, sweet." The smile deepened and dimpled. "Have you never seen a woman with her hair down before?"

"Yes," he said, "I have. But I can't remember where."

She took a step toward him. "No comparisons, then. Kiss me, and don't compare."

It was later, when the room was shadowy with dusk and she knelt above him on the divan and her hair, drier now and softer, springier, curled across his chest, that the memory came back,

more clearly, and he saw his mother's face. He dismissed this as a quirk, a fantasy out of the Freudian ragbag. Her hair had been quite unlike the girl's: gray, and above all short, cut in a non-descript bob. He could remember her lying on the narrow hospital bed, the sparse lifeless hair falling untidily over her face.

But the half-recollection persisted and on his next visit to Shoonbridge, sitting with his father in the private bar of the Heathcote Arms, he put the question to him. Wilf drank from his glass of Guinness-and-mild before replying.

"You might have remembered seeing it like that. You wouldn't be more than two—just three, perhaps—when she cut it short. It was soon after we moved into the Pilkington Road house. There was you, little, and she'd taken a lodger. She had too much to do to look after it the way she'd been used."

He could recall the Pilkington Road house, though not very clearly. The early years at Shoonbridge had been a time of constant moves. There had been the Furlong Road house first; it had been pointed out to him in later years—a large, double-fronted Edwardian house, in the town's one superior road, facing the recreation ground. Pilkington Road had been the first crisis move, followed by the corner house in Market Street and, still on an upward trend, the detached house in Calais Road. Then the second crisis, with Wilf losing his job at Kuyper's, had taken them to the squalid terrace house in Hanchurch Road. They had spent three years there, before Kuyper's took Wilf back and paid him seventy-five pounds for his lathe attachment, and they used some of the money as a deposit for a new house—"The Chalet."

Wilf said reminiscently, "She was funny about her hair, your mother. She had lovely hair in those days, a deep rich golden color, and I used to ask her to let it down sometimes, but she never would. It was as though it embarrassed her. But she spent a lot of time on it. Of course, when we lived in Manchester, before you were born, she had a maid to brush it for her. She never would let me see it when it was being brushed. In some ways, she was funny."

"A maid to brush her hair," Stanley said. He finished his drink and bumped the bottom of the glass on the bar counter, calling

for another round. "Coming to Shoonbridge must have been a shock for her."

"She never complained."

Stanley put down silver and took his glass. "No."

"She knew whom we had to blame for losing the Leverton," Wilf said. His tone was aggressive, but blustering. "Your pal, Burchall, and his likes. They turned folks against us. I'd have got through if it hadn't been for them."

"She was very loyal."

"It was her own interests, too. It was all your mother's—everything. I only ran it for her. And her own in-laws did the dirty on her."

"Didn't they offer to help her?"

"Do you think she'd have taken it? When her father had cut her out? There wasn't one of 'em good among them."

His voice was getting louder. He was in the narrow rut of his grievances, plowing it deeper, pitying himself for his persecutors.

Stanley said, "Come on, Dad. There's a fresh pint in front of you."

Wilf put his hand on the glass. "You watch them, that's all. They'll pick your brains and throw you out afterward. That's the way they make their money. They're as bad as the unions. And the churches."

Stanley nodded. He said, "I see Fynstoke have bought some new players—a wing half and an outside right, isn't it? Do you think they'll be after promotion next season?"

Wilf made a noise of derision. "Promotion! They're lucky to be in the Third Division. I watched a couple of games last season and that was enough. In the second, Brighton beat them six nil, on their own ground."

He launched into a detailed account of the game, and Stanley needed only to make appropriate sounds of approval and dissent from time to time. He thought of the Pilkington Road house and his early recollections of the long garden (it was probably only about fifty yards), the kitchen floor that flooded on wet days, the cupboard under the stairs. Memories moved along a fuselike trail: the window in his little room had been a V, pointing out. Miss Austen, the teacher, had had the room next door, and in the

evenings he had lain awake and heard her moving about, the sound of her portable wireless, her voice, sometimes, singing.

Thought darted to the other bedroom and he saw her, clearly now, sharply, sitting in front of the dressing table—which had seemed magnificent to him with its swinging mirror, but which to her must have been a tawdry thing—her thick golden hair loose along her back. He had sat on the bed and watched her as she pulled the heavy comb through it, and they had talked of strange lands where she had been and where he—she said—would travel one day. She spoke of the tall frozen mountains and the blue lake lying beneath them, of the high slanting meadows that in the summer were burning bright with flowers, of the belled cows and how they were taken up, in the spring, to still higher fields, quiet valleys which the glaciers had scoured out and left strewn with gigantic boulders, and kept there until the autumn threatened snow.

He remembered his own impressions rather than the words she said—this waking dream of loveliness and magic. But then he heard her voice, sad-toned and clear.

“All summer long . . . messages of love, from a distance.”

She was no longer talking to him, he thought. To herself, perhaps, but she spoke as though to another.

“Messages of love,” she whispered.

Looking at her in the mirror, he saw tears in her eyes. Her hand still pulled the comb through her hair. It must be hurting her, he guessed, as it sometimes hurt to comb his own hair when it tangled. But he did not say anything—only watched her as the tears gathered and fell at last.

Standing back, as a grown man, from the past, he could gauge the incongruity of her life in Shoonbridge and guess at its humiliations. She had no friends; he could not recall anyone coming into the house except formally, and when she took him with her shopping he was aware of the chatter and gossip surrounding them, and of their own isolation. He could not remember that she laid any ban on his playing with other boys, but in those early years he very rarely did. Later, when he was going to school, she let him bring friends back for tea, but the atmosphere was



constrained and awkward. He preferred having tea with them, with no napkins, milk bottles and the breadboard on the table—sometimes heavy oilcloth instead of linen.

She had not been a very good housekeeper. She bought fresh fruit, dear cuts of meat, all kinds of small delicacies that she happened to see in the shops. Then, when she had bought them, she would not eat them herself, but pressed them on him. He remembered once a small jar of paste that she had seen in the grocer's, hesitated over, finally bought. She had given it to him on bread for his tea, and he had thought it would be like the potted pastes that were produced for tea at other houses, and been disappointed by the strange delicate flavor. He had refused to eat it, and she had looked at him in sudden desolation.

"Stanley, darling, it costs so much!"

"Then why did you buy it? You didn't buy it for me. I didn't want it."

Now that the initial disappointment was over, the taste, in retrospect, did not seem so bad. He wanted her to plead with him and he would consent to eat it. But she said nothing, only stared at the small glass bowl with its foreign words on the label, as though she feared it.

In these and other ways he became aware of her disappointment in him. Words, phrases, habits picked up from other boys or even from his father caused that small contraction of the brows which he grew to recognize and to resent. In reaction he practiced them more blatantly and increasingly made the deliberate choice of Wilf as against her, snubbing her when she made some claim which conflicted with his offerings to his father. He could remember one occasion when there had been trouble over money and he had burst out, "She bought flowers on Monday! What's the good of flowers to anyone?"

This was something that haunted him for a long time and made him burn with shame years afterward, when he bought flowers and took them to her in the hospital and saw her look at them and knew that she had not forgotten it either.

Illness claimed her by degrees; at first apparent only in the need to rest which forced her to lie down for half an hour or an hour in the afternoons. She tried to hide this, but once or twice,

coming back early from school, he found her struggling guiltily from the kitchen sofa and blamed her, almost openly, for laziness. Later she was forced to go to the panel doctor, and began the long series of boxes of pills and bottles of medicine with which his memories of her were to be so strongly associated.

Things were at their worst in Hanchurch Road. Even with his inadequate standards of comparison he was conscious of the sordidness of the house, with its small dark rooms and rotting wood, the lavatory at the bottom of the garden, the pungent corrupt sweet-sour smell everywhere. The last was the sign of the bugs with which she waged hopeless battle during the three long years of their stay. Several times she thought she had cleared them out, but they always came back. In the mean little houses which huddled on either side they were taken for granted.

All that time she grew more painfully, more obviously ill, her body stooping, her face becoming white and drawn and old. His father, when he was first sacked from Kuyper's, went every day to the library to study advertisements in the newspapers and came back to write long letters, closed with a flourishing signature. This ceased in due course. He talked at times of going away from Shoonbridge to look for work, of going back to the north perhaps, but the project never got beyond talk. Men were coming down from the north to join the Shoonbridge dole queues.

There was a summer night, with all the doors and windows open and the poky little rooms still stifling from the heat, when he lay in bed and listened to them talking below, to his mother's pleading voice and his father's louder stiff replies.

"I'll get something. Things'll get better."

"Can't you go and see them? They know you're a good workman."

"They got what they wanted from me. If they want more, they can come and ask for it. I'm not begging them."

"Wilf! We can't go on like this. We owe money. We're living on parish relief as it is."

"You're all right, aren't you? You can always go to your rich relations."

"I've written to Kitty—" her voice dispirited—"but I tore the letters up."

"That's as well. We're not taking charity from them."

"We're taking it from others."

"Not from them, though."

"I don't know how I can carry on, Wilf. And there's Stanley. He needs new clothes. It's not just patching. They're too small for him. And he ought to have the school uniform for September."

"They don't all wear it. They can't make you buy uniforms, with things like they are now."

"If you'd only go and see them . . ."

"I said what I had to say to them three years ago. They're thieving swine, and I told them."

"Even if they are—"

"If! By God, don't you know they are? Didn't they take the work of my hand and brain, and laugh at me? Do you think I'll go and beg them for a job?"

"But if they said you could go back, you wouldn't refuse?"

There was a silence, and then his voice was different—slower, deeper, more real:

"I know when I'm beat, Vicky. Do you think I like seeing you in a place like this, knowing what's due to you? But I couldn't go in there to beg them. I reckon it's like you and the letters to Kitty. I've tried before now. I've gone as far as the gate and turned back. Vicky love, I'd do it if I could. I'd do it for you and the lad. But it's no good asking me."

There was a silence, which continued. He pictured them sitting on either side of the kitchen table, staring, not looking at each other, as they so often did. Listening for them to start talking again, he drifted off to sleep.

The following morning Wilf went out, and his mother dressed him and tidied him and took him out with her. He assumed they were going shopping, but instead she took him away from the shops in the direction of the factory. She gave an envelope to the man at the gate, and they stood waiting while he took it into the office. When he came back he said, "Won't be a minute, Ma. They're sending someone up with it."

Clouds covered the sky, but the air remained sultry, breathless. He thought of asking her why they had come, but guessed enough to make the rest seem not worth asking. He leaned against the

concrete pillar and stared at a dog lying on the pavement, its mouth open, its flanks gently rising and falling. The gateman shouted at it and then picked up a stone and threw it. It missed, and the dog still did not move.

A boy about sixteen, in a navy-blue serge suit, came and escorted them inside. He walked a pace or two ahead of them, his head cocked stiffly on one side—there was a large boil on the back of his neck. He took them to a larger office block and left them in a small room. Soon after an older man came out.

He said, "Please come in, Mrs. Maine. I'm sorry you were kept waiting. Please take a seat."

It was a bare modern office; although the main structure was only of wood and had a temporary look to it, the equipment was expensive. Through the windows one looked along a broad thoroughfare, empty apart from a line of parked trucks and two or three workmen, leading into the heart of the factory. Workshops rose on either side of it. A steady rhythmically hammering noise came through the windows.

"My name is Bertram," the man said. "I took the liberty of opening your letter, since Mr. Jarvis is no longer here. He went to our Cardiff factory earlier this year."

She said, "I see." She looked lost, and tired.

"I've glanced through the file on your husband, Mrs. Maine. The position seems quite clear. And I remember the affair, although I wasn't directly connected with it. His manner was—shall we say, unfortunate?"

She said, in a quiet, monotonous voice, "He felt he had a grievance."

"Over the lathe attachment? But the position is quite clear there too. It was developed on company time, the prototype was made with company materials. As an employee of the company, he had no rights in it at all."

"He worked on it at home as well."

"There's no proof of that; and even if there were, it doesn't affect the legal position. He was offered a bonus payment, and in reply he demanded a ridiculous sum." He riffled through some pages on his desk and looked up again. "Five thousand pounds! It's absurd, isn't it?"

"I don't know."

Bertram glanced at Stanley. "Your boy," he suggested, "it might be better if he waited outside?"

She hesitated. "I would rather he stayed."

"As you wish. I wanted to explain the company's attitude. We realize your husband was originally in a very different position, but he came to us as a workshop foreman. It was reasonable to assume that he would be promoted from that post—this is a very progressive firm as far as promotion from the ranks is concerned—but in fact he had to be demoted. This was a result of his manner, which was resentful toward his superiors and aggressive toward the men. We could not possibly have kept him on as foreman. The union wouldn't have stood for it. He was not dismissed then, but put to work on the machines. His actual work was always very good."

He riffled the pages again. "He was only dismissed when, following the incident of his claim in respect of the lathe attachment, his insolence to Mr. Jarvis forced the issue. I may say, Mrs. Maine, that we had the greatest sympathy for you in this matter. Mr. Jarvis was very sorry it had to happen in that way."

"I understand all that. But now . . ."

"If he had come to Mr. Jarvis, at any time, and expressed some sort of regret, Mr. Jarvis would have been perfectly willing to overlook things and take your husband on again—even though, as I'm sure you don't need telling, Mrs. Maine, we have to turn men away every day."

"I thought if I could—apologize on his behalf . . ."

"It's not the same thing, is it? You must see that."

"I promise there wouldn't be any further trouble." She paused a little. "At a certain age—one knows one's been defeated. There may be defiance still, but it doesn't mean anything. It's only something to laugh at."

"Perhaps he would come in and see me?"

"No. He couldn't."

"Then I don't see . . ."

She got up from her chair. Stanley thought it meant they were to go and half rose himself, but she went forward to Bertram's desk instead.

"I had a reason for bringing my son," she said. Her voice was dry and stiff, as though the words had to be forced through her lips. "I wanted to appeal to you on his behalf. He has won a scholarship to Fynstoke Grammar School, but unless my husband gets a job he won't be able to go there. There are—reasons for this. I can't go into them, but I assure you that this is so."

She was lying, Stanley thought; it had been agreed that he was going to Fynstoke in September. It was true that you didn't have to buy the school uniform, and they sent you a season ticket for the train. He looked at her in humiliation and hatred.

Bertram said slowly, "Mrs. Maine, I should hate to think that a son of yours lost his chance through anything that could be avoided. If you go home and tell your husband he can start on Monday, will he come?"

A sigh escaped her. "Yes. He will come."

"Then tell him. Half past seven on Monday, at his usual shop."

She said, "I wish I could thank you properly for this."

"There's no need. Oh, one other thing. The bonus Mr. Jarvis originally offered for the lathe attachment. It would clear our files if you could persuade him to accept it now. Do you think you can?"

"What will he have to do?"

"Only accept a check and sign a receipt."

"He will do that."

"I wish it could be more."

On the way home she was excited, talking a lot, making little jokes. After a time she noticed his failure to respond.

"Stanley," she asked, "what is it? Everything's all right now. Daddy's going to be at work again."

He blurted it out: "You told that man I wouldn't be able to go to the grammar. It wasn't true."

She looked sideways at him. With her slight stoop, and since he had grown so much lately, there were very few inches between them.

"It was true," she said.

"I heard you and Dad talking about it last night," he said, "about me going to Fynstoke. You said nothing then about not going."

"He doesn't know either. But I shall have to tell him soon." He was still surly. "What?"

"About my back. Dr. Beale says I shall have to go into hospital." Her face fixed briefly in a smile. "It may take a long time. I must have things settled for you before it happens."

The news did not trouble him at the time. He felt only relief and gladness that she had not been lying.

Victoria was admitted to Fynstoke County Hospital a few days after term started at the grammar school; he could recall later that he and his father, on their first Sunday visit, had been especially pleased that he could use his school season ticket for the train. Wilf had bought him a bar of chocolate as his share of the saving.

On the way back, they began the elaborate plans of preparing for her return home which were to occupy them for the next two months, becoming more and more hopeful and complex as she withered and died in the hospital bed. The house in Ashfield Road was nearly completed—the deposit had been paid and the agreement signed when the first-floor joists were up—and very soon they would be able to start getting the garden into shape. They argued amiably about small things: the homemade birdbath for which Stanley had seen manufacturing instructions in *Mechanix Illustrated*, whether the garden path should run through the center of the back-garden lawn or on either side of it, the question of a lencoop—they decided that should wait until she was properly well again. When they got back to Shoonbridge, instead of going straight home they went to look at the new house.

The site had been a piece of waste ground, even more run down than that which still faced it. At the far end there were dumps of old rubbish, and a mound of rubble shaped like a tumulus. The new houses advanced toward this section in transition from the comfortably occupied to the barely begun. No. 178 was next but one to the end; beyond No. 180 there were only piles of builder's materials and runic marks on the bare earth.

They went through the gap where the gate would be hung and stood on the patch of earth, hard and rutted and decorated

with half-bricks and broken tiles, which would form the front garden.

"Plenty of work here, Stan," Wilf said. "We shall have to get our backs into this lot."

Stanley went up to the glassless windows and peered through. The first rough coat of plaster had been slapped on the walls. The raw floorboards were stained and dusty. But the room was large and magnificent compared with the Hanchurch Road parlor. There was a blue-tiled surround in front of the fireplace and a yellow-tiled superstructure around it, with ledges on either side of the top.

"We'll have to have a name for it," Wilf said. "Something a bit special. You're learning Latin now. What's 'Our Home' in Latin?"

"We've only had three lessons." He was flattered by the request, though. "I can look it up in the dictionary."

"We'll make a real job of it," Wilf said. "Something to surprise her." He pointed at the trailing wires that dropped from the ceiling. "I saw a nice bowl up the street we could hang there—white with pink veins, like marble. We'll have to see about some furniture, too. You can get some good bargains at the Saturday afternoon auction sales."

Wilf had gone on such an errand several weeks later, when Stanley visited the hospital by himself. She nodded and smiled when he told her this, but she seemed detached, scarcely interested. He had brought some apples for her—russets, which she usually liked; but she thanked him and left the bag untouched on her locker.

He said, "The house is nearly ready. Another week or two and we can move in. They're just finishing the upstairs."

"That's nice."

"And Dad's got the front garden about finished. We've got a surprise for you."

The surprise was the concrete birdbath, which had turned out lumpy, and difficult, owing to its weight, to get into position, but which was now upright and unmistakable in its identity.

She smiled again, but asked no questions. He looked across her bed at the long line of other patients, with visitors chattering



beside them. Her silence was conspicuous, and it troubled him. He took some magazines out of the shopping bag he had brought and put them on the bed.

"Something for you to read," he said.

They were copies of *The Passing Show*, which Wilf had started taking again now that he was earning regular wages. She turned them over, looking at the colored covers. At one she halted. It showed a boy and a girl, in foreign dress, standing by a stretch of clear water which reflected the image of a jagged snowy peak. She stared at this with tired eyes.

"It's about Switzerland," Stanley said. "Was it like that where you used to live?"

"Not really."

"What was it like?" She made no reply. "When I was little you used to tell me about it."

"I suppose I've told you all there is to tell."

A nurse's footsteps clipped past the end of the bed and away down the ward. Two beds away, where a young woman was surrounded by half a dozen visitors in defiance of regulations, there was a burst of laughter. Stanley looked at his mother's silent figure as though she were a stranger.

"You were rich," he said, "weren't you?"

She shook her head very slightly. "We thought of ourselves as poor."

"But you weren't poor." He was indignant about this. "You must have been rich, living in Switzerland."

She made no response, only looking at the gaudy painting on the magazine. He said petulantly, "I bet you lived in a big house."

"No." She turned her head to look at him. "Quite a small one. Made of wood—the kind that's called a chalet in Switzerland."

She smiled. Her eyes changed. It was as though all at once she recognized him. Her thin hand moved across the sheet and touched his.

"It stood on the side of the hill," she said, "just above the village . . ."

Once she had begun, she went on talking—about the chalet itself, the village, the green hills and the surrounding mountains, brown in summer, sharply white in winter; about her father and

her sister, about balls and picnics, and riding in sleighs over the snow with the lights beginning to burn in the windows of distant houses and the horses' bells ringing all round and the hiss of the runners against the snow. She talked on and on, and he listened gratefully. She spoke for him to hear. She admitted him to the remembered magic of the past.

He said, when she paused at last, "Why did you fall out with Aunt Kitty?"

"I couldn't explain."

"There must have been a reason."

She was silent for so long that he thought she was not going to answer. He was afraid that the question had upset her and, anxious not to be banished again from closeness, cast around for some other topic. But she said, in a low voice, "Through love, perhaps."

His curiosity was stirred. "How could that make you fall out?"

"We loved one person," she said, "all three of us; and I was the lucky one. There was bitterness in that even when he was alive. When he died, it brought no peace."

He did not understand it, but he asked no further questions. He saw the closeness had been illusory, that he had been no more than a patient ear, that all their life now meant no more to her than a long unnecessary last chapter added to a story already over. And seeing this, he saw how bitterness could come from love.

The bell rang for the end of the visiting hour, and he stood up and stiffly said goodbye. He did not kiss her, nor look back from the door of the ward. But that night he found the board on which the name of the house was to be painted. He lettered it "THE CHALET" and took it to Ashfield Road and hung it in position. When it was up he could see that the letters were of different sizes and unevenly spaced, but it was too late to do anything about it.

## 2

WHEN HE WROTE the letter addressed to "Lady Burchall, La Jatte, Switzerland," it was partly with the theatrical intent of telling her of her sister's death, but there was also the thought of possible benefits to be received. He had various daydreams about this. His uncle, the Knight, would write back and offer to make his father a partner, their old hostility would be dissolved in shared grief over his mother's death (he was beginning to read Dickens at this time), and he would go to a school like Greyfriars and have a study. Or they would insist on paying to him the legacy which had been her due, and if his father wouldn't take it he would keep the money himself and buy things for him—the compromise seemed a logical one. Or his aunt herself would be dying and would leave him in her will the chalet and enough money for Wilf and him to go out there for holidays. He embroidered endlessly, visualizing hazy but complex futures.

The reply, after this, was an anticlimax. He found the envelope before Wilf did, read the letter through and pushed it to him when he came in from the kitchen with the fried fish and chips he had cooked for their tea.

"I didn't know you'd written to her," Wilf said.

The question was an accusing one. He said quickly, "I wrote at school one afternoon, and then I forgot to mention it."

The transparency of the deceit was obvious to both of them. Wilf looked at him silently for a moment, his brow wrinkled. He said, "She's asking you out there for a holiday. Do you want to go?"

He said, "Of course I don't. Why would I want to do that?"

"She'll pay your fare as well. It's all right if you're not particular about taking charity. Your mother would never have asked them for anything when she was alive, but that's not to say you can't. You can touch your cap and say thank you, and maybe they'll ask you again next year."

Anger was coming to the surface. He saw the childishness of it, but it still could make him guilty, and afraid. He said, forcing anger into his own voice, "I only wrote to tell her Mum was dead. There's nothing wrong with doing that. It's only politeness."

"Politeness is wasted on folks like that. It would be different if your mother had ever said she wanted them to be told."

He saw, too late, that he could have made this an excuse—pictured himself saying that she had asked him to do it if anything happened to her, when they were alone together that afternoon in the hospital. He could only say bitterly, "I'm not going—that's all there is to it. I didn't ask her to invite me. You can't blame me for what she writes in that letter."

Wilf watched him closely. "Are you going to write back, then?"

He did not hesitate. "Of course I'm not. I've written and told her, and that's all there is to it."

"What about politeness, then? If you write her a nice letter, maybe she'll be able to persuade you."

Increasingly of late—in school particularly—emotional stresses had brought him near to tears. He felt his eyes stinging now.

He said roughly, "I didn't ask to be invited, so I don't see why I've got to reply. They can go to hell, all of them!"

"All right, then," Wilf said. "We don't need to make a fuss over it. Have your tea, lad." He looked away from his son's tense trembling face. "Slip into the kitchen first, will you? I've forgotten the vinegar bottle."

After Sir John's unexpected visit the daydreams returned, but with a difference. His father's part in them now became shadowy, even—by a deliberate act of choice on some occasions—nonexistent.

He saw himself taken up, made much of, and now that he had made the decision to go out there in the summer he was able to resent Wilf's attempt to prevent this, to cut him off from his advantages. He was ready to argue his case if the matter were raised again and felt he was taking a reasonable revenge in eliminating his father from his visualized futures. But the matter was not raised again. Wilf's references to the project were only necessary and unobjectionable ones. He took him up to London when the time came and gave him a pound just before the train pulled out.

"Have a good time, Stan," he said. "Write me a letter. Or a postcard, anyway."

He stood waving on the platform, a figure that Stanley could already recognize as small. There seemed a finality about the scene. When Stanley settled into his place and consciously began his favorite imagining, in which he was asked to stay on to keep the crippled twins company, he did not even have to think about excluding him.

Aunt Kitty was waiting on the platform at Montreux and, after greeting and kissing him, led him to a big black car, drawn up actually inside the station. He saw the faces of the twins watching from the windows. They were less ugly than he had thought they would be. He thought of them with a kind of pity—crippled, and not having any other children to play with. Their diffident interest in him confirmed this: they would look to him for all sorts of things, and he would be glad to help them.

He felt a mounting excitement as the car cruised up the sides of the hills and the lake flattened and grew smaller behind them. This increased until, as they rounded a bend and he saw tall wooden houses in front of them and a sign by the road, "LA JATTE," the sensation was almost painful. He felt a wave of affection for the crippled twins on the seat beside him, and for the tall well-dressed woman who leaned back from the front seat from time to time and smiled and pointed out landmarks by name. When the car pulled up beside a gate and he looked up at the chalet, which, from this viewpoint, seemed enormously large, he thought of Shoonbridge and "The Chalet" without regret—only with embarrassment and some scorn.

The mood lasted during most of the morning, in which the twins showed him the house and garden, but small discords appeared quite early. When, sympathizing with their position of being cut off from other children, he said, "God, I'd go crackers!" he saw at once that his words upset them, and saw too the small glance of reassurance that passed between them. It provoked him into making a dirty retort—a standard one at the grammar school—to Joseph's next remark, and when that produced an unhappy bewilderment, reinforced by another shared look, he found himself bursting into mocking but false laughter, of which he was at once ashamed. When they took him to see the rabbits he could not prevent his manner from becoming more and more overbearing, talking about the way pet mice sometimes ate their young, telling a story he had heard about the Chinese eating mice. As Jane turned away in revulsion and he saw Joseph brush his hand against hers, he was aware of a new emotion—shame had acquired a sharp, exciting, triumphant edge. Going up to the wood he raced away from them, stood and watched their awkward limping progress, ran on again and waited again.

The emotion was an uncertain one; it lost its edge when they refused to be provoked into going up to the waterfall—he was conscious only of their excluding closeness. As he climbed the path, jumping and skipping to demonstrate his own bodily soundness, he felt a sense of defeat, as though, instead of leaving them and going on to new heights and adventures, he had been repulsed. It was interesting in the wood, but he had never had a taste for solitary pleasures. There should be someone to watch and listen and admire.

He came to the fall. It was no more than a small stream trickling down among boulders, coursing down the steep side of the hill. He cursed it, hearing his voice echo between the tall trees, and then, standing on a rock with the water rushing round his feet, gave a long war cry. They would hear that, all right. He jumped from stone to stone, crossing the stream, and found a patch of sunlight on the far side. There were wild strawberries growing, lifting small red berries on thin stems. He picked and ate them, with a return of confidence. Tomorrow Uncle John was coming, the authoritative, quiet-speaking figure who had come specially to

Shoonbridge to persuade him to accept Aunt Kitty's invitation. Things would fall into place then. The twins would realize that it was up to him to give them a lead, to them to follow. He found a broad leaf and began picking the strawberries and laying them on it, content to put off the small immediate pleasures for the later larger one.

The argument about evolution started the following morning in a mild and insignificant way; in fact, it arose out of a situation in which it seemed that the mistrust and hostility of the previous day might dissolve of its own accord. Joseph was showing him one of his books, which had a number of large color plates of horses. It was with a desire to inform that was quite innocent of self-aggrandizement that Stanley pointed out the pastern and explained that horses, which had once had feet not unlike other mammals, now stood poised forever on the tips of their four remaining toes. He had been fascinated by this revelation himself, only a few months before, and wanted to pass it on.

With their failure to grasp what he was saying he understood something of their ignorance in the matter and launched, with the same untroubled assurance, into an outline of Darwinism. Even their resistance to his discourse he attributed at first to stupidity; although they were not idiots, as he had thought they might be, he did not regard them as very bright.

Gradually, though, he began to appreciate the hard rock of obstinacy that underlay their mildness and gentleness of manner. It included what he scornfully thought of as religion, but it was not confined to that. There was a strength that defied him and that he could not touch. Their unity, the network of looks and touches and half-spoken words, underlined it. Separately he felt he would have been a match for either of them, but together they were too much for him.

The argument persisted, with growing heat on his part, more apparent smugness on theirs. When they went out into the garden it was with the clear intention of allowing the topic to drop, but even if he had been willing, a stalemate was not possible while there were two of them and he was solitary. He followed them from point to point, hammering away with a growing fury at their

refusal to pay attention to the certainties. Then, with fierce pleasure at being able to breach their assurance on their own ground, he challenged them:

"If there was only Adam and Eve, and they had two sons, Cain and Abel, how was it Cain went and found a wife after he killed Abel?"

He was disappointed when Joseph said their tutor had discussed the matter with them: that girls were not included in the records because of their unimportance. It was a bit of a swindle, but he could not prevent their believing it. But the revelation of the flaw followed fast.

The words tumbling out, he said, "They'd be brother and sister. So they couldn't marry!"

Joseph was trapped. Either he must accept that the Bible, and this tutor's interpretation of it, was wrong, or he must talk dirty, talking of brother and sister—as it might be him and Jane—going to bed together, touching each other in dirty places, indulging in those vaguely understood contortions over which he could embarrass them at his leisure. He expected blushing and tongue-tied silence, anything but the cool didactic voice saying:

"It wasn't forbidden in those days. The Pharaohs, who ruled Egypt, used to marry their sisters. Didn't you know that?"

It was said with neither hesitation nor concern. The tables were turned, and it was he who looked foolish. He shouted at them, his phrases clumsy and distorted. When Joseph said quietly, "I think it's silly," and added, "Don't you, Jane?" he could not restrain himself.

"You look like monkeys, the pair of you. A couple of ugly monkeys. Why don't you get married, like the Pharaohs did, and then you might have real monkeys for children!"

The voice from above almost cut off his last word, and he felt a panic fear at knowing that he had been overheard. He was no longer conscious of the twins. When he hesitated before making the apology, it was not a defiant act but an attempt to gather sufficient resources to speak without crying.

"I'm sorry."

"Not what anyone would call gracious . . ."

The rest escaped him; he was too much aware of the scorn in



the voice and of his own humiliation, of the sudden collapse of hopes and fancies. He ran into the house, up the cool shadowy wooden stairs to the room he had been given.

For a time he lay on the narrow bed, resisting the threatened flush of tears, controlling them at last. The small achievement soothed his spirit, and he was able to feel resentment as well as shame. They could not force him to accept this kind of treatment. He had come only to please them, and he had been provoked, after all. He crossed to the window and began to build another scene in his mind, his eye unconcernedly taking in the figures of the twins on the grass below. Jane was crying. He rehearsed what he was going to say. He would talk to Aunt Kitty, ignoring his uncle.

He packed the suitcase quickly and carried it downstairs.

"You have deserved it," Aunt Kitty was saying.

They were still sitting on the veranda, and they looked round as he took another step forward.

"I want to go home, Mrs. Burchall," he said. He would not call her Aunt Kitty. "I've packed my things."

She began to say something to him soothingly, as he had expected she would. He kept a sulky expression. Then Uncle John said, "You want to go back, do you? Right away?"

He continued to look at his aunt. "Yes."

The level inflexible voice continued, "There's a train down to Montreux in half an hour. You can catch that. The night train to London leaves about half past ten. Have you got your return ticket?"

Stanley's throat tightened. "Yes."

The questioning went on, forcing answers out of him. The scene had tumbled down again, and his visions now were nightmarish. The long day ahead, the night train, London at the other end, which he had visited only twice before and then on football trips. Above all, a defeated and humiliated return. That would be plain enough however much he tried to gloss it over.

He walked away in the direction of the hall, his feet rattling on the polished wood of the floor. The voice followed him:

"Stanley! Come here."

It brought him back. Tears gathered again.

"Take that case upstairs and unpack it. Go on."

He pulled his sleeve roughly across his face. His voice gasped, "I want to go home."

But the words meant nothing; he had lost. He stood deaf to what was being said now, hearing only the clock in the hall whirr and strike eleven times. When it was over, Uncle John had finished talking; recognizing dismissal at least, he went back up the stairs.

The twins' elder brothers came back from their climbing expedition the next day. Since they were staying at another chalet in the village, he did not need to see much of them. They were jocular and amiable, but he thought he heard his name mentioned once, followed by laughter, and he guessed they had been told about his abortive plan to go home. He kept out of their way and spent much of his time tormenting the twins, but was careful not to let himself be observed. He soon realized that they would not betray him. He did not know the reason for this and it did not make him like them any the more. He hammered away at their secrets with persistence and ingenuity, but they remained inviolable. When Uncle John and the elder brothers had gone, he had more freedom and took advantage of it to shift the emphasis from verbal to physical persecution. There was an apparent success here, in the drawn face, the voice whispering for relief, an instant of triumph that he tried in vain to make permanent. It did not last; in the aftermath they were united again and secure.

His conscious attitude toward them varied according to his mood and the situation. At times it was simple loathing, sparked by a word or a look, fuel added to it by their quietness, Jane's foot dragging on the floor, a snatch of highbrow music hummed. But there were other feelings—resentment over the big expensive books, the complicated train set, their ability to chatter in French to the maid or the gardener. Scorn for their stupidity and complacency. And desire. Desire to share, to be admitted to he did not know what. From this, and his helplessness, most of his anger stemmed. He tried sometimes, reversing his bullying, to win them over, but it was no good. They seemed to understand him only in his aggressiveness.

When Jane fell and lay rigid in the wood, he was frightened at first and ran off instinctively, thinking she might be dead and that for that he could not avoid exposure. But after a time he came down, quietly, and saw them sitting at ease together. It was plain that Joseph was used to her having fits, since they had not even gone to the house for help. He watched through the shaking leaves. He would leave them alone for today, but tomorrow he would return, still better armed. A girl in Shoonbridge who had fits had been taken away to an asylum. He would threaten them with that.

The letter to his father, which he had written the day of the scene with Uncle John and slipped out to post the next morning, taking a stamp—he did not know if it was the correct one—from Aunt Kitty's bureau, hung with a pleasantly Damoclean significance over the week. He was content to await its result, which could not help but disconcert the Burchalls. One of the scenes he envisaged was of his father bursting, unannounced, into the chalet; but the reality surprised him. He had gone down the garden, by himself this time, to pick raspberries, and the familiar voice at his elbow made him turn round quickly.

"How is it, lad?" Wilf said. "No bones broken?"

His voice was quiet and reasonable, but, after the few days' contact with the male Burchalls, Stanley found his appearance and his accent a little absurd. He was wearing the khaki drill shorts bought at a secondhand shop for working in the garden and then reserved as being of too high a quality. He also wore an open-necked red shirt, a pullover of a different shade of red, and a patched sports jacket. He had suède shoes and new tan socks, apparently designed to match the shorts. He was carrying a battered Gladstone bag.

Confused, Stanley said, "You got my letter?"

Although it seemed improbable, the quietness might mean that his father was taking the Burchalls' side. He said, "I got it. I came right away. I told Mr. Bertram and he said I could come the same day. He even asked me if I wanted any money."

Mr. Bertram, Stanley saw, had been admitted to his father's good books; he would not have much company there, but he was

not likely to lose his place, either. He also saw that he need have had no fear as to his father turning against him.

"I'm glad you came," he said.

They walked together up the steps to the house. The gardener was working at one of the higher levels, but he did not look round. There was no one to see them. Going through the open door he saw the interior in comparison with the Shoonbridge house: the high shadowy hall itself, the clock with the painted face, showing the phases of the moon and stars, the granite block stairs. They stood on the polished tile mosaic, and Wilf rang the doorbell.

The maid came from the kitchen and Aunt Kitty emerged at the same time from the *salon*. They both hesitated; then Aunt Kitty waved the maid back.

She said, "It's a surprise to see you, Wilf. Do come in."

"I took his letter to Mr. Bertram at the works as soon as it came," he said. "He said I should come right away."

"Did he?"

Stanley did not believe it, either. The resentment rose in his father's face, and he spoke more loudly.

"It's only natural when a child's not being looked after properly. He's my only one. I didn't send him here to be badly treated."

"So he wrote you a letter?" Aunt Kitty said. "He writes a lot of letters."

"It's your husband I want to see. Sir John." He breathed contempt over the syllables. "He's the fellow I want to tackle."

"He isn't here, Wilf. He took the older boys to the south of France."

"So he's gone to the south of France, after bringing my boy here to be insulted, to be treated like mud, after him coming around and begging it as a favor to have him come out here—something which I never wanted and which Stan didn't want either?"

"You don't understand. Stanley has had no more than the ordinary discipline which we give our own children. Less, in fact. He was merely told he must apologize for being rude and then sent to bed until he was prepared to stop sulking. You can scarcely call that ill treatment."

"And were your boys out of their class and away from their

home—a thousand miles away from home? Do you know what it means for me to have to come out here, what it costs a working-man? I'm not ashamed of being a workingman, Kitty—or do you want me to say my Lady?—and Stan's not ashamed of being the son of one."

"I think you could have telephoned to us first, or cabled. We had no idea that Stanley had written to you. But in any case we are perfectly willing to meet the cost of your trip."

Stanley was keenly appreciative of the fact that, as his father grew more heated and wilder, Aunt Kitty's coolness and logic became more marked. He remained quiet, but intent on the exchange, delighting in it. He had precipitated it, but could stand outside, listening, an audience, not a player. And that was how he saw them now, as players. There was nothing to be won, no conclusion to which one or the other could be forced—only their two demonstrations, side by side, of what they truly were. He was not frightened or anxious. In these two, who were at once linked and widely separated by the circumstances which had brought them here, he felt for the first time the startling beauty that might lie in the clash of human temperaments. The thought was not precise in his consciousness; nor could he have expressed it. But he was aware of the kindling in his mind.

He continued to enjoy it up to the moment that his father, bringing the scene to an end, made the melodramatic gesture of urging him to return to Aunt Kitty the pocket money they had given him. He was reluctant to comply and then, a moment later, realized they would think the reluctance was toward losing the money. In fact it was to being brought into the scene, which, on that consideration, changed its aspect entirely. He reached into his pocket quickly and held the money awkwardly toward her.

"I'm sorry," she said coldly. "I'm not prepared to play in scenes of this kind."

"Throw it down on the floor in front of her, Stan. If she won't pick it up, her servant will."

He held the money, looking at Aunt Kitty. She shook her head slightly, not registering refusal so much, he thought, as disappointment. Then she turned away, turned her back on him, leaving him on stage and exposed. He dropped the coins, heard them

tinkle and roll on the wooden floor, and suddenly saw that by his own act he had cut himself off from all his dreams and hopes: that this was a finality.

"We'll have to wait a minute or two for the case, Stan," his father said.

He had a look of satisfaction, of having shown his pride and kept his dignity. He walked over to the French doors that led to the veranda and looked out.

"It's a view, I reckon," he said, "for them that want it. But a man with an active mind would get fed up with it soon enough." He drew a packet of cigarettes from his pocket and selected one to light. "I got these from a machine at the station. Thought I'd try a Swiss smoke. Can't say I'd want to smoke them regular."

"They're not Swiss," Stanley said. "They're Gauloises—French."

"How do you know? You've not started smoking here, have you?"

"I saw them in Calais—and big advertisements for them, too."

Wilf stared at the packet. "Well, they're French, then. Not a lot of difference. They speak French here, don't they?"

This kind of comment, like the rest of his demeanor, was not new, but newly seen; the stupidity of it irritated Stanley. And his own reaction startled him. It was the first time he had ever thought of stupidity in connection with his father. He said nothing, but looked at one of the many paintings of Alpine scenes with which the walls were hung.

Wilf said, "And this was where your mother used to live. I've seen it now. And where Lye died."

"Lye?"

"Your mother's first husband."

"He died here? Wasn't he killed in the war?"

"He was gassed badly and taken prisoner. She came out here after the war to look after him."

He remembered his mother's face in the hospital, the look directed past him toward the years of happiness and love. He could still feel bitter at the recollection.

To change the conversation, he said, "That's a painting of the Matterhorn, isn't it?"

Wilf came to where he was standing. "Is it? Nay." He pointed to a small faded title in one corner. "See what it says? 'Sunset

—Mount Cervin.' " He pronounced it in the English fashion. Then he looked at the bottom of the picture and grinned. "I'll tell you something else. Do you know who painted it?"

Stanley thought the answer might take them back to the same unwelcome subject, but could not but ask.

His father said, "Your grandfather! See the name? G. Fanshawe. Gilbert Fanshawe, that was, who never worked a day in his life, and left his younger daughter without a penny piece, the old sod. He wasn't bad with a brush, was he? He had time enough to practice, and luckily for him he never had to earn a living at it." He glanced at the other paintings ranged about the room. "I suppose these are all done by him. All those years . . . There must be stacks of them lying about if they haven't been burned."

Footsteps descended the stairs, and the maid's voice called, "*Monsieur: i a malise de vot' fils.*"

The sense of loss returned, and more sharply, as they walked down the steps, his father with the suitcase and himself carrying the smaller Gladstone bag. Looking up from the gate, he could see all the way up to the balcony of the twins' room, and saw them crouch back into the shadows as they perceived his glance. He wanted then to go back to them, to plead forgiveness for everything, to make a last assault only with friendship and love. He was sure they would not refuse him. But it was all too late.

On the way down to Monticux he was sulky, paying only the curtest and most ungracious attention to his father's remarks. If he had not come, if he had written back perhaps . . . Or even if, having come, he had not ranted to Aunt Kitty in the way he had done . . . But he could not sustain this accusation for long. It was he himself who was responsible, and no one else. A door had been opened and by his own act he had closed it. There could be no reconciliation with the Burchalls now. He was left with Shoonbridge, and his father.

After that, his temper changed. There were the two of them, he saw, and although he could already see signs of differences which would be likely to grow all the time, each was the only ally the other had. There was much to hold them together.

They traveled back to England in a gay holiday mood. Arriving in London, Wilf noticed that Lancashire were playing at the Oval

and they took the bus there. Stanley was not much interested in cricket, but Wilf gave him plenty of small change to buy ice creams and chocolate and soft drinks. It was while he was on such an errand that, feeling deep down in his jacket pocket, he found a Swiss coin which had escaped being thrown down on the floor with the rest. It was a ten-centime picce. It looked a bit like a sixpence, and he wondered whether it could be made to work in one of the automatic machines. He thought about this for a moment, but then, without trying it, put the coin back in his pocket.



### 3

SHOONBRIDGE had its own secondary school, a coeducational establishment, built in the late Twenties and known as the Shoonbridge County High School. Boys who did particularly well in the scholarship examination, however, were given places in Fynstoke Grammar School, which, partly in consequence of having been founded more than three hundred years earlier, had a higher academic reputation. It also had boarders, but there were very few boarding scholarships available and they were reserved for special cases. Stanley, like the other Shoonbridge scholarship boys, covered the ten miles between the towns by daily train.

His scholarship results had been, he knew, outstandingly good. At the end of the first term at the grammar school, he was rather surprised to find himself placed as low as eighteenth in his class of thirty-two, and to find, in the end-of-term report, two masters commenting on lack of concentration. He expected things would improve, but they did not. At the end of the first school year he was marked twenty-third.

The second year followed his visit to La Jatte, and he had a few days of unexpected glory in the French classes. But there was no continuing improvement in any subject. He had become conscious by now of the slackness which had developed in his mind, but saw no easy way toward removing it, and no incentive to

persevere in the hard way. Wilf grumbled disapprovingly at times over his reports, but did not show prolonged interest and was apparently willing to accept the fact of Stanley being several months below the average age of his form as a sufficient excuse. This reaction had a consolidating effect, and Stanley settled down to a progression up the school in which his form position remained somewhere between fifteenth and twenty-fifth. More generally it inclined toward the latter.

He earned the dislike of several masters for his laziness, and for his permanently inadequate homework. This was done in the living room, on the other side of the big table from Wilf, both of them attentive chiefly to the wireless set in the corner. Quite often the homework was spread out over the whole evening, from the clearing up of the tea things around half past six until they went up to bed together at eleven, and even then was only half finished. He would make halfhearted attempts to finish it on the train the following morning, but the effort never seemed worth while.

There were individual attacks of interest in various subjects: a devotion to geography one term, which saw him placed third, with a drop to twenty-seventh when they moved from geological to meteorological aspects in the next; and a somewhat longer-lasting passion for history, which eventually put him first in that subject—the first time he had been top of any class at the grammar school. Then the struggles of the Fifteen and the Forty-five gave way to the Cabinet maneuvers of the Hanoverian politicians, and the slide began. Not quite so steep a slide; history, even at its dullest, was one of his stronger subjects.

When he was fourteen, in School Certificate year, the English class moved on to the Victorian poets and took up a more theatrical attitude toward plays, reading individual parts. Both developments fascinated him. He learned by heart long stretches of Tennyson, Browning, Flecker, Byron, Keats, Swinburne, accepting all, whatever their intentions or meanings, who could make words dance to that sensuous music. He would walk by himself, refusing company, looking for places where he could recite the verses and hear his own voice, echoing, intoxicating, in the air.

With the parts being read by individuals—even by those as

crass and unimaginative as some of his classmates—Shakespeare too opened out to him; and in learning the shape, the firm reality, of the characters, he was able to find the music there also. It was a flowering which dazed and obsessed him. It also isolated him. He had got on fairly well at school as far as companionship went, making no close friend but forming one of a group of five or six whose interests revolved around football, smut, cricket, car racing and gangster films. Now, after a single shattering occasion when he tried to recite Davidson's "Runnable Stag" to them, they abandoned him, with no regret on either side.

Another, possibly more important result, appeared in the markings for the School Certificate examinations. He was given a Distinction in English, a Credit in history and a Satisfactory in French. The rest were Failures. This meant taking the Certificate again, either at Christmas or the following July. His form master gave him the option.

"July, sir."

"You can probably pass in December, if you make the effort."

"I think July would be safer."

"And if you did pass in December, there would still be time to catch up with the stream for Higher Schools. After July, it would mean staying on for an extra year. Were you thinking of doing that?"

"No, sir."

"So if you pass then, you'll spend your last year idling about?" Stanley did not reply to this. "Well, it's your concern—or your father's, anyway. I'll write him a letter explaining the position. Perhaps he will be able to persuade you to put your back into things."

He had another year with the Victorian poets, another year watching life breathe itself into a Shakespearean play, this time *Romeo and Juliet*. He recovered the ground in the remaining subjects with no more interest and little more attention, but repetition filled out the greater part of his inadequacies, and the following July he passed the examination.

The last year at school he spent in the sixth form, in the condition, to which his previous form master had drawn attention, of having no examination to work for and therefore no positive end

in view. For the first few weeks he was content to idle, as had been predicted, sitting round the green baize tables in the Memorial Library, reading or talking with other sixth-formers supposedly engaged on private study. It was during one of these sessions that the old school dramatic society, moribund for ten years, was mentioned. Some general enthusiasm was kindled—and a strong particular enthusiasm in Stanley which carried the project on beyond the point where, normally, it would have fallen into inanition.

There was opposition among the staff, on the grounds that Stanley and his chief lieutenants, no-goods themselves, would only be likely to distract others who did have programs of work in front of them. The opposition gathered and gained strength when it was realized that, as a first play, they proposed to put on *Journey's End*—Fynstoke Grammar was not a progressive school in any sense. Somehow all this was overcome. The play was put on a few weeks after the January return to school, in the school hall, before an audience of parents, senior boys and invited visitors.

It was not a success. Lacking the help of an experienced adviser, it could hardly hope to be. Things were made worse by the last-minute imposition of a censorship by the senior English master. The extensive cuts he made on grounds of decency involved a wholesale massacre of cue lines, with the result that on the night cues were badly missed and whole speeches went astray. Things went from a poor beginning to a worse end, and the final curtain was brought down thankfully to the accompaniment of muted formal applause and restless comment in the school section of the audience. Only the near-sacred nature of the subject prevented their giving full tongue.

After this, Stanley struggled for the remainder of the Lent term to keep the society in being and active. He barely succeeded. The summer term, his last at Fynstoke, began in a riot of warmth and sunshine and, sitting in the Memorial Library with the distant sounds in his ears of the clump of bat and ball at net practice, voices calling on the tennis courts, the roar of the swimming pool filling, he recognized the futility of trying to continue further. He was becoming used to the sensation of failure. He felt depressed for a time, but accepted the fact with fair acquiescence. During the

summer he played tennis—he had finally revolted against team games, though he still went with his father to watch professional football—cut school to spend afternoons in the cinema, learned more poetry and engaged in his first romantic experience. This was with a pupil of the Fynstoke High School for Girls, a dark-haired, full-breasted sixteen-year-old called Molly. They went on illicit walks together, and she listened to him reading poetry and permitted relatively daring stroking and fondling of her body through her clothes. She might have permitted more, but he lacked both the courage and the experience that would have established this. Her father was a clerk in the local tax offices, and Stanley was conscious that it was not merely on account of the prudishness of her parents that she kept the fact of having a boy friend secret from them. In the summer holidays she went away for a long holiday in the west country, and he saw her only once or twice after that.

There had been a suggestion at the beginning of the year that Stanley himself might take the examination for Civil Service entry, but neither he nor his new form master had much real hope of this, and it never came about. Instead, about a month after leaving school, he found himself working as a clerk in the County Council offices at Fynstoke Castle. It was a routine occupation for the ruck of undistinguished school-leavers. He worked for six months in the General Office, and then, the period of probation over, was transferred to the County Education Office.

His first days at the Castle—the buildings retained the title although the castle itself was no longer used except for some storage of documents—were days of confusion, since the principle adopted was that the junior intake should learn to find their own way about with the minimum guidance. These were succeeded by the even greater confusion of the Munich days, with those members of staff who were Territorial Army men first appearing in uniform, to the shocked delight of the typists, and then vanishing altogether. They were days of excitement and portent which appealed to Stanley's sense of drama. When they were over there was a general feeling of deflation. Even a minor scandal when Miss Carberry, in charge of the Dispatch Room, finally made clear beyond a shadow of doubt her intentions toward Miss Stanhope, the gentle

silvery-haired keeper of archives, did not make up for what had been lost.

Under these circumstances, Stanley was ready to be influenced by Jim Pennycuik. Pennycuik, a sergeant in his local T.A. unit, was one of those who, resplendent in khaki, had been snatched away by mobilization. He returned in his usual office clothes, but magnificence hung about him. He was a large, heavy young man with a strong broad face, a voice that shouted cheerfully, and a dominating manner. Soon after his demobilization Stanley, listening to a Labor Party street meeting, heard Pennycuik's voice from the other side of the ring, heckling the pacifist line taken by the speaker. He put his questions with bull-like confidence and waited for the answers with unconcealed contempt. The speaker, a woman, was completely defeated by him and brought the meeting to an early and disorderly conclusion.

A week later Stanley saw him in action again, this time in the Castle itself, in the main council chamber, where staff had been gathered to listen to a speech from Sir Redeth Deane, the chairman of the County Council. His purpose, it appeared, was to assure the staff that the Council would be delighted to grant all necessary facilities to those who joined the Territorial Army, in view of the growing menace to the national safety. If some felt inclined to go to the length of joining the armed forces on a full-time basis, the Council, while it would be sorry to lose them, would bow before the nation's greater need. He was a tired old man and spoke the trite phrases impressively. Stanley, moved by his manner, looked round his brother clerks with an eye sensing incipient comradeship. He caught sight of the slumped broad shoulders of Pennycuik. Here, at any rate, was a meeting which must command his sympathy.

"Now," Sir Redeth asked, "do any of you have any questions you wish to put to me?"

His voice, still tired, was now discouraging. A paralyzed silence followed. Then Stanley saw Pennycuik rising; he felt a faint flush of sympathetic embarrassment.

"Yes, Sir Redeth," Pennycuik said, "I've got a question. In the last war, the blokes who went in the Terriers came back—those who did come back—to find their jobs had been taken by the

conchies and the dodgers. Is that what's going to happen next time too?"

He left no doubt, as he sat down, of his own expectation in the matter. Sir Redeth made a poor attempt at reassuring the mind of his audience without committing the Council to anything concrete. When he had finished, he said directly to Pennycuik, "Does that satisfy you?"

Pennycuik looked at him. He shook his head slowly. Without rising he said, in a voice of finality, "No, sir."

That same afternoon Stanley sat alone with Pennycuik in the outer office which acted as an inner defense to the private offices of the clerk and the deputy clerk of the Council. Things were quiet. The clerk was out, the deputy, at this time of day, would be deep in the *Times* crossword. Stanley filed the previous day's letter copies with no sense of urgency.

Pennycuik said, "You've not got too bad a body, young Maine. Some fat on you, but we'd get that off. You've got the height, anyway. Ever thought of joining the Terriers?"

Stanley looked up, grinning. "I might have until this afternoon."

Pennycuik's eyes narrowed. He said sharply, "What's changed this afternoon?"

"You gave me some good reasons for staying out."

"Balls! All I did was put a spoke in that silly old bastard's wheel. And I've not finished with him. We'll get some kind of guarantees out of him before we've finished. But that's nothing to do with joining the Terriers. There's going to be a war. You know that, don't you?"

"The papers don't seem to think so now."

Pennycuik grunted. "Sonny, you might as well believe old Nelly as believe what you read in the papers." Nelly was the familiar name around the office for the chairman. "There'll be a war, and it's not too far off. I'd lay a bet with you if I thought you could afford it. And there won't be any bugging about with volunteering this time. Once it starts they'll conscript you right and left. You won't be able to pick and choose what mob you go in then. You'll go where you're sent and no mistake. The boys who get in first, the Regulars and the Terriers, will get the jobs worth having. And by God they'll get the promotion!"

Stanley was not so much impressed by the argument as by Pennycuik himself, who had a wholeness, an air of controlling his own destiny, that was persuasive. Stanley had still not come round to the proposal when the time came for his transfer to the Education Office, and Pennycuik, shaking hands with him, reiterated his disappointment.

It was nothing to Stanley's own disappointment with his new duties. He found himself alone, in an anteroom that measured six feet by nine, copying cards and filing them. His only social contacts were with the clerk immediately senior to him, a long, soured, taciturn man, and the very fat typist who worked with them. He missed the constant activity and change of the General Office; and he missed Pennycuik.

He joined Pennycuik's unit of the Territorial Army, a field artillery unit, in April 1939. In the summer, while they were at camp, there was the news, celebrated by Pennycuik with drunken oratory at a titanic booze-up, of the induction of the first peacetime conscripts. At the end of August they were all in uniform again, this time following mobilization. A few days after that the country was at war.



## 4

LESS THAN three weeks later, Stanley lost sight of Pennycuik when the company was ordered to France. He himself, too young for overseas service, was posted to the holding battalion, there to spend a miserable boring winter, in the growing realization that, outside the Army, life went on much as before and that the threat of conscription which was creeping toward his contemporaries looked like taking a long time to reach them. He found himself doing unpleasant jobs under unpleasant conditions, with no prospect of any change.

It was a dreary time and had few bright spots in it. One of them was his first seduction—he was unsure later whether to count this as an active or a passive experience, but at the time he pictured himself in control of the situation. She was a small doll-like creature who worked in the Naafi, with sleek black hair in bangs and a white face, and a manner at once fetching and modest. He worried, after their first encounter, over possible consequences, because he had been both too precipitous and too modest to use the contraceptive he had drawn from the quartermaster's stores. When, however, the second time they went out, he summoned up the courage to produce it, Sylvie firmly ordered him to put it away. She explained, a little coyly, that she had her own method, that she couldn't bear those horrible things, and that if he wanted he

could buy the next jar. Without any idea of what the jar might contain, he gave her the necessary three and sixpence, and was forced, for the rest of the week, to go hungry during the morning breaks. They had one more outing together, a bleak Saturday afternoon on the moors outside the town, and after that, with her usual gentle firmness, she got rid of him in favor of a tall intellectual bombardier who played bits of Beethoven on the Naafi piano.

As winter turned to spring with every indication that he had become part of the permanent establishment of the holding battalion, Stanley's dissatisfaction increased. He haunted the notice boards for possibilities of volunteering out of the Artillery and, after unsuccessful attempts at the Intelligence and Education Corps, was accepted at last for training in the Royal Signals.

He was posted to a training battalion in the west country and trained there as a wireless operator. He had expected, coming from the Artillery, to find the discipline and the spit and polish less arduous in this more specialized corps, and was shocked to find the reverse. The Signals commanding officer, a small Kiplingesque man, with bow legs and duck feet, had been seconded to the job from a cavalry regiment, and his chief regret appeared to be that he could find no possible justification for the use of wireless telegraphy on horseback. Stanley was relieved when the end of five months' training saw him qualified as a Signals tradesman and ready for posting to a field unit. The war had now been on for fifteen months and was deep in its second winter. When he went home to Shoonbridge on leave, he encountered those who had joined the Castle at the time he did still busy with the Council's affairs, and showing no prospect of being disturbed in that activity for a long time ahead. Pennycuik, after being evacuated from Dunkirk, had gone out again, this time to the Middle East. He was still a sergeant, Stanley heard, but this did not mean he had gained no promotion. He had previously been reduced to the rank of bombardier for insubordination to a junior officer.

The second winter, only slightly less miserable than the first, was spent under canvas in various cold and muddy regions of southern England. The company to which Stanley now belonged acted as a message center for brigade headquarters and shared the

chances and changes incurred in the flexing of the island's defenses, not to mention maneuvers. With the return of spring came rumors that the brigade was to go out to the Middle East, but nothing happened. The rumors came and went for the next eighteen months, with as little result. While armies grappled to and fro across Russia, while Asia disappeared in the path of the Emperor, while America gathered its strength, the wireless trucks lumbered along quiet country lanes, from one rutted field to another. It appeared that only the long-awaited but still distant second front could wrench them out of the monotony.

The North African landings were at first just another distant ripple on the faraway landscape of war. It was not until a couple of months later that they found themselves suddenly caught up in a flurry of rekitting and embarkation leave and, almost immediately afterward, sailing down the Clyde estuary on a cold gray morning, with the surrounding docks faintly silhouetted in the mist.

Debarcation was at Algiers, but they marched through that city only as far as a sports stadium where lorries were ready to take them to the east. After a week of waiting for their own transport and equipment they moved off. They were part of the campaign now and there was the sound of shellfire in the air, and, occasionally, of smaller arms; but they sat in the same square vans tapping the same keys. The field was an Algerian one, surrounded by a rough stone wall; it showed very little difference, in February, from its English counterpart.

The campaign quickened with the better weather, came to a climax and was over. There was time for the exotic—for scorpions and lizards, for the smell of hot canvas and of growing oranges, for bathing from the long golden sands that ran down to the Mediterranean near Bizerta. There was time for relaxation too, while the cards were shuffled in Algiers for the next deal. One of the officers suggested a summer pantomime, and Stanley somehow found himself running it. The sudden bursting out of life and activity which they were witnessing stimulated him. He was taken off wireless duties and allowed to give his full time to the production of *Ali Baba*. He and the small group that had gathered round him found themselves working at all hours, in the day's sticky heat and in the

cooler but still insect-ridden night, with the broad white African moon high above the scrubby olive grove in which they were encamped.

The production was intended only as a unit affair, but half a dozen officers from brigade were invited to the performance. Stanley had written a broadly comic script, with the customary local flavoring—Ali Baba was made an Army quartermaster, and there was a long-drawn-out barter scene, in which soldiers succeeded in selling to the Arabs tea leaves that had been already used and dried again in the sun, only to find later that the eggs they had got in return had previously been emptied and refilled with sand. It went down well. The adjutant from brigade was particularly pleased and suggested after the show that it should be run as a brigade entertainment. He could even guarantee a hall in Bizerta.

The suggestion was accepted with enthusiasm all round, and a week later, under brigade auspices, they opened in Bizerta for a two-week run. They had been given a cinema in the poorer part of the city, one of the very few buildings that had escaped being wrecked in the bombardment that had preceded its capture. There they did two shows a day to a cheerful and uncritical audience. Stanley looked back later on those days with amazement and pleasure—amazement at the amateurishness and the mistakes and confusions, pleasure at the recollection of what it had been like, after nearly three years, to find himself temporarily free of the Army and doing what he wanted to do.

The visitor from ENSA came halfway through the second week. He was brought in by an officer, and Stanley did not see him until after the show. He came backstage then, a fat little man, wearing short khaki drill trousers, suede shoes with neatly rolled heather-blue stockings, and a very open khaki shirt with a crown on the shoulders.

"My dear boy," he said, "you live somewhat primitively, don't you? It reminds me of one of the cheaper brothels in the kasbah. My name's Sharpe, Quentin Sharpe. Royal ENSA Regiment, the Queen of all Arms. I hope you don't mind my dropping in like this. We're supposed to be taking over from you next week and I thought I'd take a shuftec at the doings."

During the production of *Ali Baba*, Stanley had found his social life broadening to take in the officer class, and he had coached himself in the necessary deferential amiability. He was unprepared for Sharpe's breezy egalitarianism.

He said awkwardly, "That's quite all right, sir. Do sit down. Can I get you a drink? Cognac?"

"Cognac," Sharpe said eagerly. He watched while Stanley ferreted for a bottle and glasses in the broken sideboard. "What are the delights of cynicism to those of hope? Cognac it shall be, for these few precious moments. My dear boy, let us have as little as needs be of this fascinating Army protocol, which I am sure you find even more of a bore than I do. My name is Quentin. And you, I understand, are Stanley—Stanley Maine?"

"Yes," Stanley said.

"You're conditioned, of course," Sharpe said. "So sad." He took the glass he was offered, sniffed it, drank a few judicious drops, and beckoned impatiently for the bottle. Stanley brought it to him. He examined it carefully. "For the French," he said, "to put a Cognac label on this! All our fault, of course. It shall not be forgiven us. Still, there are worse things than Algerian *eau-de-vie*, and doubtless I shall drink them in time." He drank up. "Bring the bottle back, Stanley. I never care to see them hidden away."

"You're running the ENSA show they're bringing in, are you?" It still seemed strange not to be addressing an officer as "sir." "From Algiers?"

"At the moment, we're at Constantine." Sharpe crossed his short fat legs and settled back comfortably. "Resting. The boys are resting, but the girls, I fancy, are getting screwed right and left, poor dears. We're the guests of an American corps. *The North African Follies* is our title. Have you seen us in the course of our peripatetications?"

Stanley shook his head. "I haven't seen any kind of show out here."

"What a shame. I was prepared to charge you with pinching that business with the Arab woman and the veil—not that it does either of us any particular credit. Yours is a very commendable little show, all things considered, though you could do with a better stage manager."

"I could do with one of any kind," Stanley said.

"Ah, one sees! One sees, indeed. And no doubt you did the costumes too, and the scenery?"

"I had some help."

"And the script?"

"I did the script myself."

"And acting?"

"I'm not very keen on acting."

Sharpe smiled. "There," he said, "but for the grace of God, goes Noel Coward junior. I was interested by that script. All the usual rubbish, but the assembly was not without skill. And there were a few things that had wit and delicacy. That 'Hymn to the Brigadier.' Deliciously subversive."

"No one's complained."

"My dear, no one's noticed! It's much too subtle for the commissioned classes. Do you enjoy doing this sort of thing? What a stupid question. Forget I asked it. Do I even need to ask you if you would care to abandon your wireless set, or whatever other piece of military equipment you are at present shackled to, and devote your nights and days to the entertainment and honest mirth of your fellow fighting men?"

Stanley did not reply at once; the suggestion was too unexpected and too obliquely phrased for him to comprehend it properly.

Sharpe continued: "If you need time to think it over, you're not the man I took you for. I am not prepared to offer incentives. I will only say, since it has been borne in on me that my manner and appearance sometimes give rise to misunderstandings, that whatever I may seem I am not a pouf. Your most precious possession is not in danger from my unhallowed hands. In fact, we are all approximately normal in our little group. It makes for diversion when other interests pall."

"I'm sorry," Stanley said. "I don't quite see what you want me for—or how you would go about getting me transferred."

"As to the first, I want someone to take the weight off my bent old shoulders and give me more time for the pleasures of bottle and bed. As to the second, I have authority to call on local material for reinforcements. You are most decidedly local material."

"If you can swing it," Stanley said, "I'm your man."

"Have no fear of that," Sharpe said comfortably. "I shall most certainly swing it. All I need is your name, rank, number, and the name of your unit. With those simple means, I shall press the button in Second Echelon that delivers the jackpot."

The brigade moved within three days of the closing of *Ali Baba*, and Stanley had no opportunity to get into Bizerta to see Sharpe again. They moved south toward Sfax for regrouping and in preparation for the new invasion. He wondered whether he would be pulled out before then; Second Echelon, he suspected, might be a slow deliverer even when the right button had been pressed. He was not greatly disappointed when the great convoy steamed northward from the shores of Africa toward Europe.

He was not expecting transfer during the course of the Sicilian campaign, and particularly during its aftermath. His hopes rose to a peak at which he expected every morning to be called in to the company office, and then slowly declined. They were shattered, quite unexpectedly, at a booze-up in celebration of the Italian surrender. The company sergeant, a lean Scot who disliked him, said, "Let's have a turn from Maine, the man with a mind like a drain! Come on, Maine—give us 'Eskimo Nell.'"

Stanley said, "I don't know it."

"Come on, you lazy bastard. You want to get into ENSA, don't you?" The sergeant laughed. "I forgot to tell you there was an application in for transferring you a week or so back. You've got a bloody nerve, Maine. Don't you know a Signals tradesman never gets posted out of the regiment? You ought to have tried it out before you passed your B-Three. Second Echelon politely asking the Old Man if he had an operator too many. Christ, I thought he'd start chewing tent pegs!"

Even then, after the initial disappointment, he wondered if there might not be some way by which Sharpe might overcome the rules and customs. They moved into Italy, to the shores of a cold gray wind-lashed Adriatic, with autumn well advanced and winter on its heels, and he gradually saw how unreasonable a hope it was that someone like Sharpe should do battle with the Army over an affair which had probably been no more than a whim in

the first place. He was a little resentful that Sharpe hadn't even dropped him a note expressing regret, but probably that was expecting too much from one of his type. The whole business had to be dismissed as an unsettling pipe dream.

Once again it was an unpleasant winter, scarcely brightened by the distant glow in the sky of Vesuvius erupting. It was suggested that he should put on a Christmas show, but he put it off until it was too late. He was sorry then, since it might have given him some break from duties. January was bitterly cold and wet, and February started equally badly. They moved from one squalid, soaking village to another. At meals they queued at the cookhouse under the gauntlet of reproachful stares from the women and old men and children of the district, waiting with their empty tins to rush for the swill bins when the cook gave them leave. Rations were poor and they themselves were hungry, saving odd scraps of bread during the day to toast on night duty in the wireless cabins.

Then, one morning with the wind blowing savagely in from the sea, he was instructed to collect his kit and report for temporary duties with the ENSA touring company at Bari.

"Temporary's the word," the company sergeant said when he reported with his kit at the company office. "Don't forget that, Maine. Don't kid yourself you're getting away with this lark for long. We've got a long piece of string tied to your testicles, and when we twitch it in a couple of weeks' time you're going to come back with a bang."

The theater was in the main street, parallel with the waterfront, a Palladian edifice worn by time and chipped by splinters from the December air raid. The sign at the front proclaimed "THE ROMAN FOLLIES OF 1944." Sharpe's office, overlooking the street, had pretensions to comfort—a worn but richly crimson carpet covering almost the whole of the floor and four electric fires beamed in different directions. He sat in an antique swivel chair covered in green leather, behind a very modern-looking desk of black wood and glass.

"Poor you," he said, in greeting, "have you dragged that wretched load up all those wretched steps? Do sit down. On the sofa, I suggest, and put your legs up."



It was a wing sofa, apparently covered with pink silk, and over six feet long. Stanley sat in one corner of it and took off his forage cap. Sharpe went to a clinical-seeming but capacious cabinet hung on one wall.

"When I was a wicked West End producer," he said, "I used to *long* for a sofa like that, on which to tumble all the innocent young things who came to me looking for parts. And now I have one I find I make no use of it. The idea of draping it with portions of A.T.S. underwear revolts one, and with Italian girls it's such a waste not to have them surrounded by brass knobs and dim light and holy pictures. I can offer you Scotch. Not a Highland malt, I fear, but one of the sounder blends."

Stanley nodded. "Thank you."

"I hope you did not feel I had deserted you, but of course you must have. You belong to a damnably tenacious regiment. I did not write during the course of negotiations, partly because I hate to put anything down on paper and partly because I felt that it might inspire you to say something injudicious which would have quered our pitch. Forgive the mistrust, Stanley, but theatrical people, I have found, are not the best judges of when to open their mouths and what to use them for once opened."

"How long can I stay?"

"Ah, that's the crux of the matter. I learned that the mistake I had been making was in requesting your transfer to us. Such a possibility is forbidden to those whom the Royal Signals somewhat ineptly calls its tradesmen. The trick is to get you on temporary loan. This having been achieved by a word to your brigadier—he took our Florrie out for a drive in his staff car last summer and you may say we have something on the dear eager boy—all we have to do is hold you, by any of a number of ingenious devices. We shall get a couple of early extensions quite easily. Then we may have to invent some desperate straits—perhaps I can break a leg, on paper, of course—or we can put up some pretense of expecting a civilian from England and ask for you until he arrives. If they're still awkward after that, we can break your leg or smite you with some loathsome disease—leprosy or fowl pest. The one thing certain is that we can stall as long as they can pester, and

we have possession of the body. Eventually, of course, they will tire of the paperwork and stop asking."

"I'm afraid it's going to cause you a lot of trouble."

"I hope nothing like the trouble it's going to save. In fact, it will be included in your duties; all I shall do is append my signature, and I rather enjoy signing my name. Can you type?"

"No."

"Fortunately it's soon learned." Sharpe looked at a large gold watch on a heavy gold wristband. "Almost time for rehearsals. Swill that down, and I'll take you along to meet the boys and girls."

The company had six regularly performing members. Apart from Sharpe himself, there were two men. Terry, who did comedy sketches with Sharpe and comedy songs and duets, was a beefy red-faced man in his forties; when dressed for the part he had an impressive staff-officer manner, but his natural speaking voice was broad Yorkshire and he was a lazy easygoing creature.

Charles, who was in his late twenties and had been rejected by the forces because of a medical history involving tuberculosis, was tall and dark and, apart from a rather large operational scar on his neck, handsome. In revues he did romantic duets and baritone solos extolling the life of the roamer. He was always very tense and loathed any prospect of the company changing location.

The three girls all sang, after some fashion, and two of them danced. Sally was the one who had some skill in this; she was particularly good at Spanish castanet dances and was usually billed as Carlita. She was a deep-breasted brunette—most of the wolf whistles came her way—from Birmingham, who had married a fighter pilot in the summer of 1940 in the expectation that he would be killed before Christmas. He had survived, however, and was now a squadron commander with a desk job. He wrote her long pleading letters, telling her of the house he had got near the airfield, of all the furniture and modern equipment he was putting in it, and of the charming people he knew in those parts; and she occasionally wrote brief replies that told little and burned no boats.

Florrie, who also danced a little, was shorter and blond. She was neat and tidy and had a winning smile that appealed to the

romantic instincts of the audience. Most of the fan mail came to her, and she replied with brief friendly notes in a round school-girl's hand.

Both of these were in their early twenties; the third woman, Heather, was more than ten years their senior. She was slightly built, with auburn hair of which she was particularly proud and large dark-gray eyes. She had a powerful soprano voice with which she sang old-time songs and the more softly sentimental modern ones, hitting her high notes with ease and then gliding under and over them in throbbing vibrato. She also had been married, but there had been a divorce at the beginning of the war—the reasons and the responsibility for this were both vague.

All three women were under unrelenting sexual pressure from the officers with whom they came in contact, and they succumbed to this in their various fashions. Sally was the most frank and light-hearted about it and displayed a cheerful and unstinted appetite which with equal enthusiasm took in handsome young men and generous older ones. Florrie was more secretive in her affairs and tended to take a more commercial view of her assets. She would have been deeply insulted by an offer of money, but she thought it reasonable to sell some of the expensive presents which she picked up from time to time. Heather was the only one who remained high-minded about sex. She shunned the casual encounters of the other two and devoted herself to one love affair at a time. These lasted for weeks, months even, and were followed by as long a period of unassailable virtue, before she stooped to accept a diffident courtship once more.

Apart from the performers, there were—on loan, like Stanley, from Army units—three batmen-drivers and a cook. They were also available as scene shifters and prop makers. Both they and Sharpe were conscious of the cushiness of their present billets, and he never had any trouble in making them toe the line when occasion required it. Stanley, as his deputy, took over their administration, and a few months after he joined the company Sharpe succeeded in securing his promotion to sergeant as a means of emphasizing this. It was an acting rank only, of course, and would be lost on return to his own unit. But by this time the prospects

of ever returning to his unit seemed remote. He was not even sure where they were now.

The Army personnel were occasionally brought in, to their great delight, for walk-on parts in the straight plays which Sharpe insisted on producing to prevent, as he said, the song-and-dance routines from driving him mad. Stanley was required for these, too, of course, and in time found himself capable of handling minor parts with fair competence. He also learned a great deal about stage management and production. He found that Sharpe had been speaking the exact truth in declaring that he expected Stanley to take most of the load off his shoulders. All that was routine and laborious in his duties he passed on to Stanley. He did this with charm and friendliness, but with inflexible determination. When he jibbed once, Stanley was astonished to have the threat of a return to his unit, silken but unmistakable, applied to him also.

For the most part, Stanley was happy enough to do the work, which was arduous but fascinating. The life was pleasant, too. From Bari they moved west for a season in Naples and then, following the success of the summer campaign, went north to Rome. As Sharpe's assistant he had a place at the functions and cocktail parties, and the whole group lived well and in what was, by his recent standards of comparison, extreme luxury.

From an early stage Sally proved willing to make room for him, providing the space was not already occupied, in her bed. Later, in Rome, there was a more serious *affaire* with Florrie. During the course of it she refused the usual invitations from the usual officers, and he was gratified and touched to find her trying to deceive him about the nature of her past activities; while admitting that once or twice she might have permitted more, she tried to convince him that, appearances notwithstanding, most of her suitors had been sent empty away.

They had gone out for the day to Frascati when she told him this, and were sitting in the grounds of a villa belonging to a wealthy Italian lady who had befriended the company. Florrie looked at him with wide serious eyes as she lied to him. Across a crumbling stone wall, covered with the bright-blue flowers of some creeping plant, one looked down a fall of land to the vast

hazy stretch of the plain and the distant heat-wavering outlines of the city.

He said, "You don't have to say that, Florrie. It really isn't important."

She said, arguing, "But you must be a bit disgusted by the way we seem to carry on sometimes—the way Sally does carry on."

He said, "Why should I be disgusted?" He stretched and felt his shirt, lightly damp with sweat, move against his skin. "It's very natural."

With a kind of prim bitterness she said, "It may be, for her."

He saw her gaze at him with her little-girl look of innocence and realized it was not entirely false, that despite lies and experience's artifice she was sincere now. She waited for him to make the move—the word, the gesture—which would lift them from friendly passion into love; she was even thinking of an engagement, marriage, lifelong fidelity. It was the first time he had provoked such a feeling in a woman, and although he remained wary it delighted him.

He said, in all sincerity, "I'll never forget this afternoon, Florrie."

She nodded. "Nor will I."

There was the whirr of cicadas, individually nerve-rasping but combining into a sound that he would always associate with somnolence and peace—and, it was true, with Florrie. She was wearing a silk khaki shirt, open at the neck, and nothing under it. He put his hand out to touch the warm damp skin.

She drew back at first. She wanted to preserve the picture of innocence and reluctance she had drawn for him. To yield, with love still unstated, unrequited, was to settle for the lesser thing. She bit her lip and looked at him with reproachful eyes. She was very fetching. Gently but determinedly he pressed on with his embraces.

"Oh, well . . ." she said. She snuggled her warm blond head against his face and arched her body. "You make it very hard for a girl," she whispered.

There were other opportunities, of which he took advantage, with girls outside the group, but his main interest was the theater:

after mastering the standard tricks and techniques he went on to experimenting with new ones, under Sharpe's amused and watchful eyes. In the war's last spring they moved up to Florence and he wrote a play there: a comedy-thriller with strong undertones (and some overt lines) of social comment.

Sharpe, after reading it, said, "Quite neat, Stanley, and there are some very nice things in it. In fact, you astonish me. I would not have thought you could do it."

"Will you use it?"

He spoke roughly, and Sharpe looked up at him with mild surprise. Now that he had finished the play Stanley had conflicting urges to hide it away and to brandish it as conspicuously as possible. He regretted showing it to Sharpe, and at the same time wanted to hear him say he would put it on.

Sharpe ignored the question. "You have an odd *mind*, Stanley," he complained. "In the theater one learns to categorize, particularly between the entertainer and the moralist. The moralist may entertain, but only incidentally and only in a suitably intellectual fashion. The entertainer never moralizes. You fall so hard between the stools that I suspect you go right through the boards. Of course, that's only one man's opinion, dear boy."

Stanley said savagely, "All right." Sharpe had his pudgy fist on the typescript and gently beat it from time to time by way of emphasis. "Give it back to me before you wear it out."

Sharpe eyed him speculatively. "I don't really see you fitting into any particular stream."

Stanley got up from his chair and went to Sharpe's desk. He plucked the typescript away.

Sharpe said, "Don't you *want* an opinion on it?"

"I'm not interested in opinions. Only in production."

Sharpe goggled for a moment and then laughed. "How very wise of you, Stanley! And you have taken such care to construct it so that it falls within the scope of our limited resources. Will you give me *carte blanche*?"

Stanley eyed him suspiciously. "Are you serious?"

"I shall have to excise all those strong meaty lines which inform the audience what is rotten in the state of Denmark. Quite apart from the fact that they might get us into trouble, they hold up the

action. After that, with a little tinkering hercabouts and thereabouts, I think it will go. We shall use it as a one-nighter in the first instance. Afterward, we will see."

"Quentin," he said, "I'm terribly grateful for this."

"It is right that you should be," Sharpe said. "What Shaw wouldn't have given for the chance to put on his own play at your age. Not to mention Shakespeare." He took the script back from Stanley's hands and opened it thoughtfully. "There was one particular thing which I couldn't mark, since I was in the bath when I spotted it. Stanley, draw us a couple of shots of that bourbon from the mountain boys, and we will drink to your success."

Stanley filled the glasses and brought them over; Sharpe took one. "To success," he said. "But say it softly. She is a tender timid creature, and easily frightened away."

In this case, she never came near. There was a little tepid applause from the uniformed audience, but more of restlessness and the wrong kind of laughter, and quite a few seats emptied between the acts. Stanley left the theater before the end and went out to get drunk. In the early hours of the morning he found himself lying on his back in front of the Pitti Palace, staring up at the moonlight.

Sharpe took the company back to England at the end of the war. He had decided to do the home circuit in order to renew old contacts as a preparation for the postwar struggle. He discussed the future with Stanley in the bar of the Salisbury the day before they were due to start the provincial tour.

"Filth is the thing," he said, "provided one can get away with it. Dirty jokes and nude tableaux. The nudes especially. All those horny-handed sons of toil in those grubby north-country towns, who've been married twenty years and never seen a naked woman. Such a glorious storing up of lust. If we were only allowed to run brothels they would be a hundred per cent healthier and we would be incalculably richer. As it is, one has to take care of the Watch Committees and the Methodist civic-decency brigades. But they are a waning force, I fancy. We are marching forward into a brave new era, Stanley. In due course, perhaps, nudists will

walk the streets of Leeds and Cardiff. Meanwhile, one must titillate. How delightful a word that is!"

Stanley said, "Are you going to get the girls to pose on this trip?"

"Under ENSA auspices? My dear boy! In any case, poor Heather wouldn't do. She has a very pleasant body, all things considered, but it lacks those extra inches. And I don't think either Sally or Florrie will want to stay with me after this present tour. The writing is on the wall, and they are both sensible girls. Florrie will marry some nice colonel before he returns to the stock exchange, and Sally will go back to that husband of hers, unless she finds a more promising one."

"Our revels now are ended."

"Well, not quite. And there is the problem of you, Stanley. You are in an early group for release, I believe?"

"I ought to be."

"Ah, yes. Six years out of your young life. But not entirely wasted. Have you thought of what you are going to do when you are demobbed?"

He said ironically, "The County Council has kept my job as a clerk open. My salary was forty-two pounds a year when I was called up, but I understand they are prepared to do rather better than that."

"The stage would be better. Not a great deal better, but better. I should be happy to have you stay with me, but I won't hide from you the fact that I myself will have to dogsbody to someone, however inept, with enough capital to put the show on the road and keep it there until it starts paying for itself. And the eventuality is not a sure one. Morality may beat us to our knees. The point, in any case, is that dogsbodying to a dogsbody is a job satisfying to neither the spirit nor the pocket."

Stanley nodded. "I see that."

"Nor can I hold out any hope of our serving as a vehicle for future plays that you may write. Our line of country—"

He said quickly: "You don't have to tell me that, Quentin."

"What about one of these university courses for the returning warrior? It would give you a year or two to look around at things."

"I'm not qualified."



"But who is! I'm sure we could get over that little difficulty if you liked the idea."

Stanley shook his head. "I don't, actually. I don't want to put things off for that length of time."

"You have an impetuosity which could be a disadvantage to you. Then it's either the County Council, or Naughty Nudes for the North, or some other little thing that happens to turn up."

"You'll have me?"

"I never refuse cheap labor—and I assure you it will be cheap, if not downright sweated. I shall be delighted to continue with our association, Stanley. But, of course, something more profitable may turn up."

"I don't think so."

"One never knows, dear boy. Fate can strike anywhere. That's my one encouraging maxim."

It struck in Liverpool. She was among the crowd at a party Sharpe gave as a part of his softening-up-for-peace campaign, and he took her at first for one of those wealthy fortyish ladies who like to feel they are close to the springs of creativity and art. Subsequently, when she made reference to having been a pro herself, he revised his opinion and decided that she might have married off the stage but retained touch for reasons of sentiment or boredom. She wore no rings, but she might be widowed or divorced.

She had retained a good figure, thickening only slightly at the waist, and her face, apart from a network of small wrinkles round the eyes, was scarcely lined. She had blond hair streaked with brown and in one or two places with gray. She dressed well, and with discretion. She wore only one piece of jewelry, a flower clip which, if the diamonds were real, was probably worth over a thousand pounds. He thought they were real.

She had come by herself, and she thanked him and accepted when he suggested taking her home. He found a taxi, and they rode off to the west of the city. It would be a pleasant little encounter, he thought; he took her gloved hand and pressed it gently. She smiled noncommittally.

He said, "Peggy what? One never catches a surname at these things."

"Peggy Brean."

"Mrs. Brean?"

"No, Miss. And you?"

"Stanley Maine."

Her brow wrinkled slightly. "It seems familiar."

"I'm afraid it isn't. It's my first time up here. I'm not long back from Italy."

She lived in a quiet well-to-do mansion block overlooking the river. When he had paid off the taxi, she said, "Will you come up for a drink?"

"I was hoping you'd ask me."

The flat was even better appointed inside than he had thought it would be. She brought a tray with Scotch and soda and put it on a small table in front of the chaise longue where he was sitting. As she sat down, he reached for her hands and pulled her round to face him. She looked at him with level amused eyes.

"You must be good," she said. "I insist on that."

For answer, he tried to kiss her. She pushed him away quite firmly.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"If I had to give reasons, one would be that you're too young—  
young enough to be my son. A more important one is that I don't do this sort of thing."

"Why not?"

"As I said, I don't have to give reasons."

He released her and picked up the glass. "I'd like to know them. Miss Brean, the beautiful, virginal Miss Brean—no husband, no lover, and life pelting past. I'd like to know why."

"I don't know whether you should have had another drink. You drank a lot at that party."

"But tell me why," he insisted.

She drank herself, and put her glass back with rather too much care. He saw that she also was a little drunk—that perhaps this accounted for her letting him take her home. If she really hadn't intended a seduction, that was. He was not yet prepared to take her word on that.

"It's quite simple, Stanley," she said. "I'm a kept woman. Not that I'm telling you anything you wouldn't find out very quickly anyway from some of our friends back there."

"I've always wanted to meet one."

He put his hands on her again, more purposefully, but she twisted away with surprising agility. She got up and walked over to the fireplace, which was covered by a large Japanese lacquer screen.

"I was afraid the news might have that effect," she said. "So I'd better fill in some of the details. I'm very fond of the man whose mistress I am, probably a great deal fonder than most wives are of their husbands after nearly twenty-five years of marriage. He's a rich man, and a generous man, and I'm well enough provided for to be able to cut away from him tomorrow if I wished to. I don't want to."

"Even if you are very fond of him, you can be fond of other people too. You're not trying to tell me you've been faithful to him for twenty-five years!"

She tossed her head back, smiling. "But I have. You may not believe me, but it's true."

"And the people who bring you back home from parties—you send them all off with a smile and a lecture?"

"I don't usually let strange men bring me back." She made a small gesture, putting one hand to her breast. "I get lonely at times. There was no one there tonight that I both knew and liked. I liked you." She smiled again. "And I knew you were the nice kind of young man who wouldn't cause any real difficulty."

"Don't be too sure."

"Oh, one can always tell. The troublemakers stand out as much as the queers do." She shook her head slightly. "I really have had enough to drink. I think I'll slip into the kitchen and make some coffee. Would you like some?"

He said resignedly, "I suppose I might as well."

He strolled round the room when she had gone. There was a small bookshelf in one corner; it contained a couple of dozen best-selling novels, together with some more practical titles: *How to Entertain Guests*, *Knitwear Illustrated*, *Finance for Everywoman*, and four or five large cookery books. There was also a

book more conspicuous than the rest, bound in blue morocco, the title gold-blocked: *Sickert's—the First Hundred Years*.

She came in with the coffee and set it down on a table. She said, "Nothing very interesting there, I'm afraid."

He brought the book to her, open at the full-page photograph that formed the frontispiece. Speaking casually, he said, "It depends what you call interesting. That happens to be a picture of my uncle."

She looked at him, not the photograph, startled, silent, her eyes considering. She said at last, "Stanley Maine. I knew I'd heard it. But it must have been years ago."

Even then he did not grasp it at once. "You mean you know him?" He stared at her, and then his gaze traveled slowly round the room. "This is his place, then? My God, that's funny!"

"You don't look like him."

"Don't I?"

His voice sounded strange to him. He felt a pounding excitement, a sensation compounded of anxiety and triumph and vindictiveness. He dropped the book and stared at his uncle's mistress.

She said, smiling, "I can't get over it."

He caught her quickly and firmly and pressed his head down to kiss her; she tried to evade him, but he was using his strength now. She said, still struggling, "Don't be a silly boy!" He made no reply. They swayed together in the middle of the floor, and then he fell, holding her, against the chaise longue and from there to the deep-pile blue carpet. Her skirt rucked up, showing her thighs, and she tried to pull it down, but he caught her hand and forced it back, pinioning it beside her face. "Don't," she said, "please don't! This won't do you any good."

The struggle continued for some time, inconclusively. She made things as awkward as possible for him, and eventually, desire subsiding into embarrassment and annoyance, he began to look for a way to break it off. But just at this point he sensed a difference in her, a softening, a weakening. He pressed the attack more strongly home against her, not hurting her but forcing her hands back behind her head. He put his head down to kiss her again. She turned her face away, but did not try to stop him from kissing her on the side of the mouth. She was breathing heavily.

He felt for her breasts, and she gave a sudden swift sigh.

"Not here," she whispered. "Not like this."

"Well, then?"

"Let me get up."

"No tricks," he said warningly.

"No tricks!" She laughed, her voice shaky and breathless.  
 "You're like a schoolboy!"

"With such an uncle," Sharpe said, "I really don't understand why the possibility of exploiting him didn't occur to you earlier."

"I've told you. My old man and he have always hated each other's guts. There was some kind of shot at patching things up when my mother died, but it ended in a bigger row than ever. It was partly my fault."

"And you think a letter now will soften his hardening arteries? Something brave and simple, signed Sergeant Stanley Maine, ENSA? I should not have thought so, but probably it's a stone worth turning."

"He had three sons, and then a boy and a girl, twins, both crippled. The crippled boy is all he has left now. The other sons were killed during the war."

"And will this make him love you more?"

"He'll show the letter to Peggy—he's bound to. She will persuade him easily enough. She has a lot of influence over him."

"Wouldn't it be simpler to have her make a direct introduction?"

"I don't think so. There would have to be a lot of explanations."

"Such as how you and she came to be discussing him in such an intimate and chatty way? Yes, I perceive. And do you plan to continue this little friendship on the side?"

"Probably."

"Is that wise?"

"The tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses of experience."

"Who's that? Blake, I suppose." Sharpe said with some petulance, "Why is everyone quoting Blake all the time just now? Such a bad poet at big thinks." He paused and looked at Stanley. "Do you mean that—about the tigers of wrath?"

Stanley grinned. "Well, lust. The passions are interchangeable in Blake quotations."

"But you do dislike Uncle, don't you?"

He shrugged. "It's over twelve years since I saw him."

"That hardly seems important. It's the intention that counts. And yours, I take it, is to get what you can out of the situation. A cushy job in cotton. For this you are prepared to spit in the eye of the County Council and turn a deaf ear to the blandishments of the footlights."

"I can carry on with local rep stuff. The theater—"

"Is a bad wife, but a good mistress. Are you trying to make me scream? Well, you have my blessing on your little venture. If I were your age and had a rich uncle, I should be tempted to do the same."

"But you wouldn't?"

"It's hard to say. In my early twenties I despised wealth and security, but then I had always been comfortable. Could I have seen at that point what middle age would bring me to, I might well have cut my throat, but nothing deceives like ambition. You, if you will forgive my being personal, Stanley, have lacked the silver spoon, and been rather strongly conscious of lacking it."

"So you think I shall give up writing plays and settle for cotton. You're wrong, Quentin."

"No, you mistake me. I think on the whole you will probably have your cake and eat it—and greedily, gathering up the crumbs and eating those too."

Stanley smiled. "You're not very pleased about this, are you?"

"Well, heavens, did you expect me to be?"

"Not really. Anyway, he may turn me down, or offer me something even more derisory than the County Council."

"In which case you will nobly stand by me? It's a small hope, but a hope. Enough to go out and get drunk on?"

"Just about enough."

## 5

**J**OSEPH'S WEDDING was the occasion of his third visit to Aboukir House; he was still ill at ease in the place and made more so by the fact that the dress suit which he had hired was tight under the arms. He was also very conscious of the fact that he knew no one there, and found himself talking a lot to make up for it. This was not the part he had planned to play—he had intended to be discreet and quiet—but he was caught in it.

Joseph, when they were brought together, had smiled and made some noncommittal remark. The recognitions were strong: the uneven eyes, the nondescript crooked face, even the angle at which his leg jutted out. And the smile. He remembered the smile. Thinking of it, Stanley felt—as powerful, as unchanged—the old resentment. He did not permit it to last. It belonged to childhood and was meaningless now. And there had been no justification for it even then. His uncle and aunt might have been at fault, and he himself, but not the twins.

"Congratulations, Joe," he said. "I hope you're going to be as happy as you deserve."

That was sincerely meant. He was sorry for Joseph, and he thought he seemed likable. It was a different thing with the woman he was marrying; Mildred struck him as having all the unpleasant arrogance of the class to which he assumed her to belong. She

had the heaviness of feature and the sullen stiffness of expression which, on slender evidence admittedly, he associated with upper-class females.

When they were introduced she said, in a nervous, rather harsh voice, "Of course, you're Joey's cousin. He's told me about you. You're working in one of the mills up here, aren't you?"

Her glance darted past him, looking for others.

"Yes," he said, "I work in a mill."

She looked at him quickly. "I'm sure it must be very interesting. I gather you're learning the business."

He nodded. "From the very bottom."

She gave him a blank artificial smile. "Yes, of course. *Would* you excuse me, just a minute? I'm being waved to from the other side. I'll see you again before we go."

He gesticulated with an empty glass. "Have a good trip, anyway."

He was preparing to leave with the other guests, but his uncle stopped him. "I haven't had much chance to talk to you today, Stanley. Do you have to go back right away?"

"Not if you'd like me to stay on for a time."

"Stay the night. Your landlady won't mind, will she? You can give me a hand with the cold meats."

At their first interview he had been distant and critical, his brown eyes narrow in their pouches of flesh. Since then his manner had become increasingly open and friendly, though it was still peremptory. That was understandable, Stanley thought; for the length of his own lifetime, this man's word had been instantly obeyed in all the enterprises with which he was connected. Without having any personal desire for that kind of power, he felt a little in awe of it.

It was the first time he had dined with the old man. Sitting at the other end of the polished walnut table, he realized the change in his status; this was a different kind of acceptance from the wary nod in the unfamiliar study.

Sir John said, "You're settling down all right at Lees Grove? Getting the hang of things?"

"I think so. By degrees."

"Reg Porter seems to like you."



"He's been a great help."

"Help yourself to the wine. It's a goodish claret, but I have to ration myself to one glass. No need for you to do that for a few years."

Stanley took the decanter and refilled his glass. He said, "I don't know anything about French wines. I got to like Italian."

Sir John nodded. "They're better than the worst French; a long way short of the best, though. You'll find that reputation mostly has a reason. Fashion runs in decades at the most. Things that run in centuries belong to a different order altogether. Do you think you'll know all there is to know about cotton in six months?"

Stanley smiled. "I would have to be a real fool to say yes to that, wouldn't I?"

"Aye, you would. How much will you know, do you reckon?"

"A little more than I do now, which is practically nothing."

"Pick up as much as you can."

He was puzzled. "Well, yes, of course"

"The reason is, I may want you in the head office when you've done your stint out there."

"Whatever you say."

Sir John pulled the trolley with the cheeseboard toward him. He helped himself to a slice of Camembert and a slice of Cheshire. He said, "Sickert's was always a family firm—I was almost the first outside the family to get on the board. I was the first to get control. I meant to keep it as a family firm: my own family. Up to the start of the war I had two boys in it, Dick and Steve. Dick took it a bit lightheartedly—he was more interested in skiing, car racing, things like that—but he would have buckled to if there'd been need. Steve was to be relied on. He'd have taken over in due course."

His voice was low and monotonous, and the phrases went raggedly, stopping and starting again suddenly. Comment, or any response, would have been out of place.

"Lionel was different, of course. He was going to be an architect. I can see now he would have been a good one, a great one, perhaps, but I didn't see it then. It made no difference. He had his own ideas, and he wasn't prepared to yield much ground on them. When the war came, he decided he was a pacifist."

There was a silence. Sir John looked down the table.

"Come and help yourself to cheesc, Stanley. The Cheshire is made on the farm here." He pushed his own plate away and poured himself water from a carafe. "The funny thing is we came nearer to a row over his pacifism than we ever had. The other two had both joined up, both in the Air Force. You would think I would have been glad to see Lionel declare out of it. But I never thought war could touch them. I always expected them to come back safe. And they did, of course. Dick to be killed in a car crash, and Steve, after all those raids over Germany, to die of pneumonia. I couldn't blame the war for that, could I?"

Through the open window came the sound of planes returning to the nearby American base. The wash of their engines trailed across the quiet evening.

"It was after Steve died that I changed my mind about Lionel. He was in one of the Quaker ambulance units. The funny thing was, he was on the point of changing *his* mind. He was beginning to think he ought to fight as well. He came up here on leave, and I talked him out of it. At least, that's what I thought at the time. I'm not so sure now. I think maybe he was sorry for me. He told me he had decided to come into the firm when the war was over, instead of going back to his profession. I don't know whether he meant it. Perhaps he guessed it wouldn't make any difference, anyway. He was reported missing during the Normandy fighting, and they confirmed his death nine months later.

"That's when I realized there are two levels of action, Stanley. Getting your own way in the little things only calls for will power, determination, steadfastness—all what I used to call the virtues. On that level a man can do his work and look for his deserts. But the things that matter are ruled by chance. You can never really understand that until you're an old man, and it's too late then to come to terms with it. You have to go through the motions of hope."

A silence followed. Sir John's gaze brooded on the window, behind which the spring dusk was deepening. Stanley said nothing. At last his uncle turned his head slowly round toward him.

"You don't mind my talking about your cousins?"

"No."

"Your mind fills up with memories and it's a relief to let it overflow. I can't talk to Joe. I've never known how he felt about them—how he felt about anything. There's too much comes between. That's why I could never ask him to come into Sickert's, the way I asked the others. A father has claims on a son, but only if they're earned. I never earned any on Joe. He's always been on his own."

"Is he serious about publishing?"

"He's serious about cotton! He doesn't want it. He's more civilized about his rejection than I was, but he's more final too. There's nothing I can look for from Joe, except a friendly interest."

The last words were spoken bitterly. He looked up at Stanley again.

"I'm not used to strangers round me. I suppose I should learn to get used to it, but at my time of life habit's the great comfort. Don't build big hopes on this, Stanley. I'm too old to start looking for new heirs too. And even if you weren't too young and a bit too frivolous, the days are past when a chairman could foist his nominee on the board in a firm like Sickert's. There's no future to the job, but if you can handle it I'll see you get well enough paid for the present. Will you settle for that?"

"Very willingly."

"Then keep your nose down to it at Lees Grove for a few more months, and we'll see what can be done."

He had thought his father might show some resentment about his going to work for Sickert's, but after a brief bewildered grumbling Wilf appeared to accept it. During the war he had been working very long hours at Kuyper's and earning extremely high wages. He had begun to save money, and, as time went by, saving had become an obsession with him. He spent very little on food and practically nothing on clothes, selling his clothes coupons in the factory and buying, when he did buy, at secondhand shops.

Stanley thought at first that his aim was security, and that it was this—a triumphant answer to the hardships of the Twenties and the early Thirties—that his father saw reflected in his steadily increasing balance in the Post Office savings account. But he saw in time that there was something else. The bargains illustrated it. At first they were small and practical—an old oil heater that, once

made to work, could eliminate the need for coal, a secondhand carpet that cost less than it would have done to replace the holed and torn linoleum in the living room. But gradually they took on a different aspect. He bought three cases of stuffed birds for a shilling, a nineteenth-century set of *Britannica* for one and six, a pianola with dozens of playing rolls for a pound. A month later he bought a small hand organ for thirty shillings; the two instruments faced each other across the front room like sorrowful contestants.

"Are you going to learn to play the organ?" Stanley asked.

"Well, you never know," his father said. "I might."

Stanley laughed, amused and irritated. "There's nothing in it, is there? You could do a bit of composing as well."

"Anyway, there's the pianola."

His exasperation increased. "They've invented a thing called the gramophone. Didn't you know?"

"Well, it's not the same, is it?" Wilf ran his hand along the side of the organ. "Look at this wood, Stan. You couldn't make a think like this for a couple of hundred. Thirty bob! Look at the brass. If I stripped it I'd get more than that for the parts."

"Are you going to?"

"I don't know. I'll have to give it thought."

Stanley watched his brow wrinkle as he pondered this, and understood what it signified: the last defense against the realization of failure. The workshop at the bottom of the garden had been abandoned for the overtime the war had brought, and it would have been too great an effort to go back to it now. Nor was there room for it. After reasonable hope had gone, the hopes of fantasy took its place. For others they might lie in the football pools, or the spring double. For Wilf there was the burgeoning of a world in which values were displaced in time, traced back to origins. The depreciations of time and fashion were ignored; the debased coin of the Fifties bought the panoplied richness of Victoria's day.

Stanley felt sympathy stab him, and guilt, but the guilt was short-lived. The bargains had begun before he went to Sickert's; the defeat was personal and he could not involve himself in it even if he wished. He thought of the rich old man in Cheshire who

could cushion his griefs and loneliness by buying a forgotten discarded nephew. If the time ever came, he thought, he would have no mercy on him.

"You didn't see this, did you?" his father said. "I got this at last week's sale. For ninepence." He pulled it out from behind the organ; it was a screen, about four feet high, that might have stood once among the ferns and the bright flowered walls of a pre-Raphaelite drawing room. "Look at that, Stan. That's real silk, and hand done. You don't get that kind of work these days."

It was real silk—faded and stained, but real silk. Tired chrysanthemums nodded on it; their stems had faded into the background, but the flowers still had a dull bronze glow.

"Yes," he said. "It's very pretty."

When he went to London he visited Joseph and Mildred, partly as an obscure form of confirmation that he was there on the firm's business, partly from a sense of duty; but other reasons developed. He was fascinated, for one thing, by the small rich elegance of the house and of their way of life. It seemed to him, probably because it was so much easier to imagine possessing this than the more conspicuous and more old-fashioned wealth of Aboukir House, the epitome of luxury. And he felt drawn toward Joseph, the recollections of his old envy reinforced by a new bewilderment at his cousin's contentment, his security and transparent joy in the possession of a quite ordinary young woman.

Though his view of Mildred was changing also. On his second or third visit to their house, he made some reference to the poverty of his childhood, and she, after a curious, hesitant glance, capped it with a story of her own. They were sitting in the L-shaped drawing room on the first floor, and Joseph had been playing records of chamber music. Stanley's remark had been made, as much as anything else, to postpone the next part of the recital.

He said, "I thought you came from a long line of dukes—or stockbrokers, anyway."

"What gave you that idea?"

"I don't know. The wedding. The way you looked, and talked."

"I was too nervous to know what I was doing. I don't even remember seeing you there."

"So you really know what it's like," he said. "Secondhand clothes, scraps of cheap food, seeing other kids with bicycles and pocket money."

"I remember once we went for a day to the seaside—an excursion to Brighton. I had a shilling to spend. I spent sixpence of it sending picture postcards to two girls at school. Without quite saying so, I managed to make it sound as though we had gone there to stay properly, for a week or a fortnight. And for days after I was terrified of meeting them in the streets."

"We lived in a house that had bugs once," he said. "For two years. I can still smell them."

"Two years! I don't remember anything else."

"I can't compete," Joseph said, "in this contest."

Mildred smiled at him. "You can be glad of it. Is there any more gin?"

"We ought to form a society," Stanley said. "The sons and daughters of the poor. Minimum qualification: to have seen your household goods gathering dust on the back shelves of a pawnbroker's shop."

"There'd be millions of us," she objected.

"A second qualification, then—to be sitting drinking martinis in a house in Long Terrace, or some reasonable facsimile."

Joseph held out a Booth's bottle and shook it.

"Empty," he said. "You lose your membership cards."

"Didn't I bring another bottle up?"

"I'll go and get one," Joseph said. "While you tell each other satisfyingly harrowing tales."

They heard his footsteps, a dragging uneven rhythm, go down the stairs.

"With all due respect to my cousin and your husband," Stanley said, "he doesn't know what it's like—not only what it was like, what it is like."

"No," she said, "he doesn't know."

There was a conspiracy between them; open, innocent, a little alcoholic. She smiled, and he liked that. Normally her expression was serious, a trifle forbidding; the smile lightened it physically too, making her seem almost pretty.

She said, "There's a special savor in good things, isn't there?"

Wines, clothes, furniture—things other people take for granted. I like to sit here and think what it used to be like.”

“You’ve got it,” he said. “You’re secure. I’m only a guest, remember.”

“I don’t think you have much to worry about!”

“Security’s the thing,” he said. “You ought to understand that. I can’t marry it, as you did.”

Her look changed. Her gaze for a moment was vulnerable, hostile; then it eased. She said slowly, “I had a scientific career in front of me when I married Joey.”

“Yes,” he said, “a nice little niche in the middle middles. You would have hated it, wouldn’t you? You want more than that. I know how much you want.”

The hostility returned, but only briefly. She smiled again.

“Wanted,” she corrected him. “I’ve got it now, remember?”

Joseph was coming back upstairs. He nodded.

“I’ll try to remember.”

## 6

HE HAD ANGLED for the Christmas invitation to Assiton and was delighted when he pulled it off. He had been his uncle's personal assistant for over three years and had his own room permanently at Aboukir House, but he still felt he was neither one thing nor the other—more than employee but not quite family. For these few days, at least, he would be family. It was a breach, an assurance. He had written to Shoonbridge, explaining that he could not get down there until the New Year, and had a letter back from his father almost entirely concerned with accounts of his brewing activities. He had picked up from somewhere a recipe for making his own beer, and the house now stank permanently of decaying hops and malt.

On Christmas Eve he drove over to Liverpool. Although it was scarcely necessary, he took his usual precaution of parking the car several streets from Peggy's flat and walking round there. He found her watching television; there was no local service yet, but the Sutton Coldfield transmitter was in operation and long-poled aerials rose above the block of flats to pluck the distant signals from the air. In another corner of the room a small Christmas tree was decorated with tinsel and little electric candles.

He kissed her, found drinks for them both and kissed her again. She turned the sound down, but left the vision on; while they



tangled and embraced on the chaise longue the small figures went on prancing and grimacing, and a face broadened into a close-up smile as they went, arms and fingers entwined, into the bedroom. When they returned, he put the volume up, but coming after him she turned the set off altogether.

"It's for lonely people," she said. "Something to help you face old age."

He patted her arm and went for more drinks.

"I can't be here too long," he said. "Don't forget I'm staying at the ancestral home."

She did not reply immediately. Then she said, "You're pleased about that, aren't you?"

He looked at her curiously. Their love-making had been less satisfactory than usual; she had been distant—desperate and unassuaged. He said, "Well, yes, I'm pleased. Any reason why I shouldn't be?"

"No." Her voice sounded bitter. "It's understandable. Anyway, I understand it."

He brought her a drink. "Get outside this. You need a little of the festive spirit."

She put the glass down and went over to the tree. From its base she picked up a small package wrapped in gift paper. She handed it to him.

"My present for you, Stan."

He unwrapped it carefully. Inside there was a heavy gold cigarette case, engraved with his monogram. He snapped it open and examined it with pleasure.

"It's a beauty, Peggy. You're too good to me. Especially since I can't give you anything decent in return."

She looked at him, smiling slightly. "What is it this time," she asked in a brittle voice, "a bottle of scent from Boots's? Or a box with two tablets of Yardley's soap and a tin of talcum powder?"

He grinned at what he thought was the joke. "Bath salts, as a matter of fact."

"Keep them, then," she said. "Have a bath yourself with them at Aboukir House." Her voice was strange, and not joking.

He said, "Damn it, Peggy, you know how it is. Anything I gave

you might be noticed. I would like to have bought you something, but we have to be discreet. You know that."

"I read in a book somewhere that men give women gifts when they're not sure of being any good in bed—it's to make up for what they're not able to give them."

Stanley grinned. "There's probably something in that. If so, you should feel flattered."

"It's not like that with you, is it? You get satisfaction out of getting things from me. And if I don't give, you're willing to ask. Like the hundred pounds for the deposit on the car. That was supposed to be a loan, when you were short of cash. You're not short now."

"I offered to pay it back. You said it didn't matter."

"You didn't need much persuading."

"All right, I'm a mean bastard. I'll put a check in the post for you tonight. With interest. Will that do?"

She asked, "What is it you don't want to admit?"

"I've told you, I'm admitting it!"

"Not that." She paused. "When you make love to me, what are you saying to yourself in your mind?"

"Good God, what do you think I'm saying?"

She said slowly, "I think you're saying, This middle-aged female body is my uncle's rightful property. The pleasure I get is the pleasure of stealing it from him."

He said angrily, "Don't talk like that!"

"Like the things I buy and give you—all bought with his money." She looked at him, her face twisted with pain. "Do you steal the petty cash at the office too? I bet you do."

"You're jealous," he said. "Don't you see that? Is it my fault if you're his mistress—if I'm invited to Aboukir House and not you? Can I do anything about it?"

"Don't fight me," she said. She sounded tired. "I don't want to fight."

"By Christ! What do you call it, if not fighting?"

She shook her head. "It's over, Stan. I can't take any more of it. I've known it for a long time, and I thought it was better than—than being without you. But coming here from his house tonight and . . . I can't stand it. It's no good."

"Are you trying to tell me you're developing a conscience after all this time—after four years?"

"No. I managed to live with the conscience. It wasn't easy, but there were compensations. Now the compensations have gone. You have nothing to give me but emptiness. I never expected love, but there was pleasure and companionship; now there's only humiliation. And I'm too old to bear it."

"If I go now, I shan't come back."

"You think it's a threat," she said, "but it isn't. No longer. I want you to go, Stanley." She turned away from him, toward the television set. "Have a good Christmas."

It was not until he was back at Assiton, and accepting the invitation from Mildred and Joseph to stay with them on his next trip to London, that he realized he still had the cigarette case. He could drop it through her letterbox some time, he thought, or perhaps post it. But at the back of his mind, he knew he would keep it.

In the intermission he got to the bar early and fought his way back through the crush to her with drinks. She had found two seats in a corner. There was a rather claustrophobic intimacy, with people standing close against them and chatter reverberating at the higher level. It was as though they were hiding behind the crowd.

"Enjoying it?" he asked her.

She smiled. "I just love it. And I should never have come here otherwise. It's much too low for Joey's taste."

"But not for yours?"

"I have weak moments."

"So do I. I think they're a good thing."

"No. They make the rest seem like f—king."

"And is it?"

"No. Honestly."

"You're an honest woman, aren't you, Milly?"

"Why do you call me that—Milly?" Her eyes were on his, serious but not angry.

He said, "It seemed natural."

"It's what I used to be called. I loathed it utterly."

He nodded. "But it's different between fellow members, isn't it?"

She gave a gasp of laughter. "I'd forgotten that."

"Laugh again. I like the way your earrings shake." He put his hand out and touched one of them. "They're very nice too. More of the family loot?"

She held her head fixed a little on one side while he examined it. He had never realized before how white her skin was. She was wearing a light scent that reminded him of some flower, but he could not think which. Releasing herself gently, she said:

"In a way. They belonged to Joey's twin sister, Jane."

"But she was only eleven or so when she died. And a cripple."

"A friend of the family gave them to her—some old Russian general."

"I think I remember them talking about him—he used to have the chalet next door. It's a funny sort of thing to give to her. She was terribly ugly, poor little devil." He looked at the stones that lay against the white neck. "Well, they've found a good home at last."

She said, "La Jatte's a lovely place, isn't it? To have spent one's childhood there—Joey's been lucky in some ways."

"They never went outside the garden. Did you know that?"

She nodded.

"I don't have very pleasant memories of the place. I'm afraid I was a little swine. I bullied them, both of them."

"I think I can understand. That was only a week, anyway. He had all the rest of the time."

"Inside the garden gate."

"That might not be too bad, if everything one wanted was inside."

"It couldn't be."

She looked at him. "Not for you, perhaps."

"Nor you. You know that."

She was silent for a few moments, and when she did speak it was of the play. He accepted the change of direction and went on to discuss it technically. She listened, making intelligent comments from time to time. When the bell rang for the end of the interval, he was telling her about the musical comedy he was writing himself, with two acts completed and a third sketched out and partly written.

She said, as they made their way back to their seats, "Will you invite me for the first night?"

"We'll have a box," he said. "Joe as well."

"Joey won't come."

"He will for this."

She smiled up at him. "Maybe he will."

On the way home she was radiant and volatile. He had a feeling in the taxi that if he had kissed her she would have responded, but out of high spirits and in all innocence. It would not have meant anything, nor led anywhere, but all the same he felt a glow of satisfaction at delivering her to Joseph lovely and untouched. He made his excuses and went to bed early, leaving her almost dancing round the room, humming tunes from the show.

He was still awake when he heard them come upstairs, more than an hour later; he had his reading lamp on and was jotting down notes and snatches of dialogue and lyric. His bedroom was on the floor above theirs, with the bathroom on the half-floor. He had left his door ajar, and he heard Joseph's dragging feet on the stairs and later Mildred's quicker tread. But she must have tiptoed up the last half flight; he did not hear her until the door opened and she stood there. She was wearing a white silk wrap over a white nightdress. It was all very light and feathery, and the glow from the landing illumined her body.

"I saw your light," she said. She added chidingly, "You were supposed to be going to sleep."

"I will now. There was something I wanted to do."

With a few hurrying steps she came to the side of his bed and pressed the switch which put off the light. Then, white and shadowy, she bent down and kissed him, quickly, warmly, on the lips.

"Thank you again for the evening," she said. "Good night, Stanley."

He lay back against the pillows after she had gone, savoring the moment. The spontaneity, the warmth and the chasteness, the untroubled closeness, delighted him. It had been altogether new and wonderful. He thought of her with affectionate admiration until he fell asleep.

When he first tried to put the call through he was told that the line was engaged, and so he asked the girl on the switchboard to keep the call in hand. When nothing had happened after a quarter

of an hour, he started making other calls. When they finally made contact, he said,

"Board of Trade? Can I have extension four-three-one?"

"Not the Board of Trade," she said. "It's you, isn't it, Stan? Where on earth are you?"

"Milly! I'm afraid I've got you mixed up. You were engaged when I first tried. I'm at the Dorchester."

"Whatever for? When did you get in?"

"Fairly late last night. I took an evening train up."

"But why not come here as usual? Why a hotel?"

"I thought it would be more suitable, with Joe being away."

"For heaven's sake! One doesn't have to be so proper with old friends, surely. And there's Greta to chaperone you, in any case."

"It's only a flying visit, anyway. I'm supposed to get back tonight. I wondered if you would have a meal with me—lunch, that is."

"Love to. Where?"

"Here would be best for me."

"I'll be there. What time?"

"About a quarter to one?"

They had a pleasant comfortable meal, talking of unimportant things. When it was over, and they had had coffee, Stanley looked at his watch.

"I suppose I'd better be getting you a taxi."

"What are you doing?"

"This afternoon, nothing till four. I have someone to see then."

She touched his arm. "Let's go for a walk in the park. You can walk me home. The day's too lovely for taxis."

They walked down toward the Row. The afternoon lay warm and heavy around them, the smell of grass challenging, even overcoming the huge stale smells of London. It was cool along the broad avenue, under the shade of the trees.

She said, "I wonder if Joey's getting weather like this in Switzerland."

"There are supposed to be heavy thunderstorms in France."

"Poor Joey. La Jatte can be bleak when the weather's bad. Think of him sitting watching the rain clouds sweep over while I'm walking off a wonderful expense-account luncheon on a gorgeous afternoon."

He chided her, "You should keep up the pretense that I paid for it."

"Don't be silly. Stan? What happened to the musical comedy you were writing?"

"I finished it."

"Well?"

"I sent it to my old ENSA boss. He takes a tired old troupe of strippers and low comics around the provinces, but he's known better days."

"What did he say?"

"He advised me to stick to cotton."

"Oh, but why?"

"He told me I was looking for success for the sake of success—that I wrote without passion or sincerity. He said I was a trimmer by nature, and you can't trim in the theater. He said, finally, that if I were starving I might write a good play, but he was reasonably sure I wouldn't allow myself to get into that condition. It was all quite true."

She said indignantly, "I don't see why you need believe what one man says!"

"Because his words strike echoes."

She moved away from him and flung herself down on the grass like a child. He followed her, seating himself carefully beside her.

"You ought to have more courage," she told him.

He laughed. "That's implicit in the indictment, too!"

"You're not going to do anything about it?"

"One has to accept things at some time."

She said, "If you were mine, I'd give you courage!"

The words came out quickly, thoughtlessly, born out of the casual moment. It was the following silence that gave them meaning and uncompromising shape. Stanley turned over onto his elbow and looked at her.

"Yes," he said. "I think you would."

She did not say anything, but looked away, blushing. Her hand lay on the ground. He put his own on it, feeling at the same time its warmth and the coolness of the grass.

He said, "I've never loved anyone before. Do you believe that?"

It was important that she should believe it. He sought for her eyes, and they came round at last to his.

"I believe it."

For the first time, he was not thinking of the future, of what might happen. He bent down to kiss her, gently, wanting nothing but the simple security of love. He brushed her lips with his, a token, a message undeflected by desire. It was she who suddenly reached up, whose arms clung and pulled him toward her, whose lips moved and parted. It did not shock him; he had no questions now.

When he drew back, he said, "The hotel?"

She shook her head: her smile was luminous, gay. "Take me back. It's nearer."

"And Greta?"

"It's her afternoon off."

He wondered then if she had intended this, if her thoughts, as they walked together, had been of the waiting empty house. But the answers did not matter. Dazed by love, he got to his feet and, putting a hand down, lifted her after him. She came, laughing, into the hollow of his arm.

Afterward he thought his mistake had been in letting her send him away when Joseph left them. If he had stayed with her for the rest of the afternoon, they might have healed each other—the broken bones of love might have knit and fused into something which could not again be broken. But she pleaded to be left alone, and he accepted this. And when he came back, an hour before the time Joseph had said, they were both still raw, and estranged and lost. They said disjointed things to each other, and he smoked a chain of cigarettes.

He was sorry for Joseph, to start with, and ready to remain silent and resigned either to anger or reproach. He did not feel it was his fault, or Mildred's, but it was Joseph who had suffered most and would suffer more. For them, this was a bad time through which they must pass to reach happiness; for Joseph it was a horror that could only get worse.

He felt still sorrier when Joseph acknowledged his helplessness and defeat, and when he went on to make his forlorn plea that they



should treat the episode as not having happened, forget what had been seen and done and felt. When Mildred said, "You'll take me back?" he assumed that her amazement was based on the same half-pitying scorn which informed him. The shock came when Joseph said, "By my own choice, I could never let you go." He was watching Mildred's face and saw that it held neither pity nor contempt, but hope.

He started to fight back then, although he already suspected it was too late. He directed his words against Joseph, but it was Mildred's consent he was struggling for. He looked at her only when Joseph had left them and gone downstairs to his study. Her face was very pale, her lips trembling. With a little hope he thought, We are together again now, alone. We only need to see each other as we were in the park. Let the mud settle, and the reflections will be bright in the water.

He went to her, and she did not try to stop him when he took her in his arms. They kissed quietly, like old friends who are desperate, but not from love.

He said, "Come away with me, Milly. Tonight—now. I should have said it this afternoon. But we can go now."

"You didn't say it this afternoon," she said. "If you had . . ."

"It's not too late."

"It is," she said. "It is."

"But why? What prevents it?"

"We have nowhere to go."

"Everywhere!"

"Only backward." She looked at him in appeal. "I can't do that, Stan."

He understood what she meant. "No pawnshops. I'm getting seventeen hundred a year."

"One of the middle middles." She smiled painfully. "And how long do you think you will be kept, once you've taken his son's wife away?"

"I know people. I can get another job."

"Perhaps. Perhaps not. The people you know know him."

"I'll get something." He took her hands, holding them tightly. "Milly, do you love me?"

"I do." She spoke with desperation. "Oh, darling, I do!"

He said happily, "Then it will all be all right. You said it yourself this afternoon—you would give me courage. It's true."

"But it's I who am the coward."

"We'll give courage to each other."

"It doesn't work. You can't fill a broken jug. I know myself, Stan. I might have gone with you this afternoon, because then I thought I had lost—all this. I can't do it now."

Hope ebbed, running away into parched ground.

"You love me," he said, "but not enough to give up a rich husband and a comfortable home."

"Don't be bitter."

"And Joseph—you don't mind him thinking his wife is just a slut, so tired of him, or disgusted by him, that she's ready for anything in trousers?"

"He makes the terms. I've no right to complain."

"I can't believe it." His hands tightened on hers, and he saw her wince. "I can't believe you are as worthless as that."

There were tears in her eyes. "Stan darling, let's be kind to each other. That's all we have."

"Let's be honest."

"Worthless people can still love, as well as they're able."

"If you call it love."

She said, "I suppose love is as good as the lover. We have to put up with what we are."

"We?"

"You and I."

"I was ready to give up everything for you. I still am. Nothing else matters to me."

Her head was averted.

"Well? Don't you believe it?"

"I believe you believe it."

He said angrily, "What are you trying to say? Be straight with me, Milly. Tell me what you think."

In a low voice she said, "I think you would be ready to give up everything to take me from the Burchalls—to take away Joey's wife, his father's hope of grandchildren."

He released her quickly. "That's not true."

Now she looked at him, trying to smile through her unhappiness.

"Not altogether true. I know that. And I do love you, even though I'm a coward. But the truth there is in it would grow and grow and become monstrous, just as I know what my weakness would turn me into. We would hate each other as much as we hate ourselves."

He said, aware of his own desperation, "So you will let him drag you away to La Jatte, lock you up with a batty mother-in-law in a broken-down Swiss village? You're not getting much out of that. This house, the expensive furniture and the Victorian bric-a-brac, all the right people you've been getting to know—you'll lose those just as much as if you came away with me. Don't you see it?"

"Even now," she said, "you don't understand how weak I am. None of that matters."

"What does matter? Only money?"

"Safety."

"If I had the money, you'd come with me?"

"Don't make it worse for me."

"I'll get it. I'll get it, and I'll come for you."

It was the last throe of his despair; the promise rang as false to him as, he saw, it did to her. They stared for several moments, reading each other's helplessness. Then her hands lifted and reached toward his.

"Darling," she said, "kiss me goodbye."

He did not go to her, but looked once more and turned away. The house was very quiet as he went downstairs and out into the street.

THE WOMAN who admitted him was a small wispy gray creature in her fifties, who spoke rapid French which he could not begin to understand. But there was someone coming downstairs, and an English voice:

"Who is it?"

"Stanley Maine."

He looked up and saw her, an old woman but seeming powerful and in good health. She was wearing a brown skirt and gray jersey and, apart from her hair, which was untidy, looked a typical well-to-do unstylish Englishwoman. Nor did she show any hesitation in recognizing his name. She came downstairs, smiling.

"Stanley, of course! How nice to see you. Come on into the *salon*. Marie will bring tea for us. You have grown into a powerful man, Stanley. But you were big as a boy."

He followed her and let her seat him in one of the armchairs. The inside of the chalet, like the outside, was smaller than he remembered. The polished floor of the *salon* had been much wider when he had walked across it carrying his suitcase. He looked at the chamois head on the wall; it was drier and dustier, and even from here one could see a network of cracks across the dark nose.

"It is the children you have come to see, of course," she said. He was startled for a moment, and then realized she was referring to

Mildred and Joseph. "They've gone down to Montreux, but they will be back soon. They never stay away long. I imagine they will be coming up on the four o'clock train. If you wished, you could walk down to the station and meet them."

"I'd prefer to wait here," he said, "if you don't mind. There's no hurry."

Time was only one of many things that had turned from an urgency to a luxury.

She said approvingly, "I'm glad you don't want to hurry. And I'm very glad to have you here. I very rarely see new people." She got up abruptly. "Come. Come here."

She went to the French windows and, opening them, stepped out onto the veranda. Stanley followed her, feeling the bite of the April air. She pointed down toward the village. "Look," she said.

The snow line ran through the village; the road was clear, but drifts were still piled on either side and there were patches of snow on the roofs. It had a tired gray look.

"There," she said, "the open space above the brown villa—that was where the Hôtel de Naye used to stand. They pulled it down, during the war, and took the bricks away on lorries. There's the Sport d'Hiver, next to the station, crumbling behind its shutters. And there—" she pointed to the huge brown stone building that dominated the village—"the Edouard Septième. They open it up for two months in the year, as a children's holiday hotel, a *colonie*." She stared at it, smiling. "We were married from the Edouard, your mother and I—a double wedding that was talked of for years after." She turned and looked at him intently. "Did you know that?"

He shook his head. "No."

"You've come from John," she said. "How is he?"

"He was all right when I last saw him. He doesn't sleep well."

"I don't suppose I shall see him again. It's strange, isn't it, that you can marry a man, live with him, bear him five children, and still, after all that, become strangers to each other? Do you know why we parted?"

"No, Aunt Kitty. He never discussed it."

She laughed, a vigorous laugh, a little too loud.

"I'm free of that, thank God! I discuss what I want. I left him

when the twins were born. He was shocked and disgusted by the sight of them. I think he would have killed them if he'd had the courage. I came out here with them. I loved them, you know. I never loved any of the other children as much—I only ever loved one other person like that, in all my life. I brought them here, and I kept them hidden from the world. I persuaded myself I wouldn't take them out because I didn't want them to be stared at, perhaps laughed at by other children. But the real reason was that I wanted to keep them to myself."

It was quite cold, standing out there, and he rubbed his hands together surreptitiously. She did not seem to notice the cold.

"I kept them from the world," she said, "but I gave them to each other. They had no place for me. I meant no more to them than old Peppi, sitting in his tumbledown house, drinking cognac and imagining Alex and Trina would come back to him, from all those Russian winters. So I'd lost for the second time. In the end, when Janey died, he left me and went back to John. But by then, losing hope of love, I'd lost fear of loneliness. They amount to the same thing."

She stared out across the drab uneven snow. Clouds lay in long bars along the sky, looking harder and more stony than the white-edged mountains.

"It was so different when we were married," she said. "They hadn't yet built the hotel at Champney—they had only just built the funicular. And now the hotel's closed, and they're talking of closing the funicular as well. The place was buzzing with life. And all I knew was that Vicky was marrying the man I wanted."

"You were marrying Uncle John."

"They were friends. It meant being near him, instead of staying out here alone. And perhaps I thought I might get him somehow, on some terms. Even in those days a young woman could have ideas like that. But it was impossible. He stayed in love with her, but in any case he would never have betrayed her. When I realized that I kept away from them, until she came back here to have her baby, and it died. Then I told him what I felt about him. Or tried to tell him. We were saying goodbye, at the station. It was a way of ending everything. I had no hopes then."

"I didn't know my mother had any children before me."

"Didn't you? She was told she mustn't have another. While she was married to Lye he kept her to it, although he wanted a son."

"But my father was willing to take the risk? And she died, ten years later."

"She chose it herself. And you're alive."

"Why did she marry him?"

"Your father? Perhaps she thought it would keep Lye alive for her, a little. It failed with us, with John and me, because we were jealous—we made claims. Wilf didn't. She was safe with him."

"Safe!"

"He couldn't hurt her."

"Poverty and humiliation—don't you think they hurt?"

"She didn't have to endure them. She only had to come to us."

"That would have been worse. She had pride."

"When Lye was alive, she would have come. And she would not have been begging. She had a right to half of what Father left. It wasn't a fortune, but it would have been enough to make things comfortable."

"My father wouldn't let her take it."

She shook her head. "I can understand, except about you. Poverty for her was an armor, but for you . . ."

Almost automatically, he said, "She didn't love me."

His aunt stared at him. "No. I didn't want to say that, unless you knew it. They think I'm an old mad woman who says any nonsense that comes into her head, but there are some things I don't say. Did you know that all the time?"

"I think I sensed it. I knew when she was dying, in the hospital, when she talked about . . ."

"About Lye?"

He did not answer and a silence fell. There was a distant whistle, and the sound of a train, but he realized that it was coming the other way, from the Oberland. His aunt leaned out, looking at the snow in the garden.

"The birds are hungry. They've eaten all their crumbs today. I must get some more for them." She did not move, but let her gaze range farther down. "We used to bob down from Champney even as late as this, and the runners would skim over patches of brown earth and then back onto snow again. The Tulenkovs would some-

times stay into April, if their Easter was late. On the morning they left we would go in to say goodbye, and have ginger cordial with funny-shaped little chocolate biscuits, and it would be all goodbye, goodbye till next winter. . . . Where has it all gone? Look, the Chalet Russe is tumbling down—it belongs to the bank, and they say it isn't worth repairing. Where those saplings are growing—that was the croquet lawn; and a tree's fallen across the rose garden. The windows are broken, and the wind howls through. And people still hunt through the world for happiness."

At another time, her ramblings might have saddened him, but he was proof against them. She turned abruptly toward the house. "Come in," she said. "I must get more crumbs for the birds."

The servant brought tea, and she served it to him—Earl Grey in thin white cups patterned with blue flowers. She had forgotten the crumbs.

She said, "I have an album I can show you. It's in the study. Wait while I fetch it."

It was a heavy boxlike affair, bound in scratched brown leather, with a thick silver clasp. She put it down on the table and opened it and showed him the faded sepia photographs, blurred by the light of forgotten days. She recalled and identified, for herself rather than for him, the register of cousins, aunts, friends, and the recurring images of two small girls, hand in hand or side by side, looking not into the future but into the distant sunlit present. The years advanced, with the turn of the stiff pages, and the girls were young women, and there, larger, glossier, more carefully fixed in, were the wedding photographs. They were smiling, and smiling at the men who stood beside them.

His aunt got up abruptly. "There's another album upstairs," she said, "with the smaller photographs. I'll go and bring it."

He heard her moving about upstairs and went on glancing through the album. The camera had preserved all this, the smiles and the poses and the lies, but it meant as little now as tears and truth. Mechanically he came to the end, where unmounted photographs, postcards, old papers had been pushed in together and forgotten. He pulled one out from among the others. It was type-written, in blurred and faded purple ink, and carried a date in the top right-hand corner: June 18, 1911. The letters were old-



fashioned; the "8" gaped open at the top. It was a report on the properties of some kind of cloth.

He started reading it idly and then, amused by the ornate and cumbersome style, gave it closer attention. "Research has shown," he read, "that it is not the heat, but the light rays that exact the severest effect on the human physique . . ." The day of the topee, he thought, the high noon of confidence. They spoke with such power and assurance, and they were so wrong. "These deadly actinic rays may be neutralized by passage through a scarlet substance . . ." Swathe yourself in scarlet against the dread actinic rays, the burning sun in the pitiless empty sky.

There was a movement from the hall, and he looked up, thinking his aunt must have come down without his hearing her. But it was Mildred who stood looking at him from the doorway. The happiness in seeing her again was calm, warm, unanxious.

"Stanley," she said. She smiled. "I thought you would come."

"As you see."

"Where's Mother?"

"Upstairs somewhere. She said she was going to find another album for me, but that was ten minutes ago."

"She forgets about things. And wanders off, if someone doesn't watch her." She smiled again. "And has been known to take her clothes off and walk through the snow."

"She didn't do that this afternoon."

"No."

She stood there, coming no nearer, and he was content for the present that they should remain like this, watching each other, their eyes remembering.

She said, "We read about it in the papers. But not how it happened. How did it happen?"

"Out of despair, I think. Despair enough to stop being a trimmer, to forget all the tricks. It's a love story, a tragedy."

She said, "Yes," understanding. "But not bitter?"

"Tragedy isn't bitter."

"I'm glad. And it's a great success?"

"The bookings are solid for months ahead. Broadway in the autumn. And the film companies. I can't believe the offers, but my agent turns them down."

"Then you've shaken the dust of Sickert's and Aboukir House from your shoes. Were you very pleased about that?"

He knew what she meant. He said slowly, "I thought I would get a lot of satisfaction out of it—demonstrating my independence, putting the old fool in his place. You know. And then when it happened, I was hunting for ways to break it to him gently. . . . It was all different."

"We all change," she said. She smiled, but he felt sadness tug at him, like the first ripple of a long ebb tide. "Joey was pleased to read about the play, too. He's been doing some writing out here—poems, a memoir."

"And you?" he asked. "What have you been doing out here, Milly?"

"Living."

"When can you come back with me?" he asked. "Today? Come now. Come as you are. We can get anything you need in Paris."

"You're willing to buy me?"

"That's not what I call it."

"We were both driven," she said. "You by envy of Joey, I by resentment because he had given me what I most wanted. I wanted to prove I hadn't sold myself. I wanted to be free of my own fears."

"You can be free now."

"To sell myself again? Am I worth more as Joey's wife?"

"Not any longer. Believe me."

"I think I do believe you."

"I love you. Just that. No more. I don't want to hurt anyone. I wish you weren't his wife."

"But you would take me?"

"On any terms." He said it humbly.

She looked at him with steady eyes. "I wanted you to come here and say what you've said. How can I tell you . . . ?"

"Say it."

"For Joey's sake."

His own calm surprised him. He said, "Go on."

"We released each other. Afterward, you could write, without compromising . . ." She hesitated. "And I could let myself be loved."

"Loving is an act, not a surrender."

"For a man, perhaps. For a woman, the surrender must come first."

"You're telling me you love him?"

"I wanted you to come so that he would know, beyond all doubt. Was that very unfair?"

He wanted to take up her question and answer it savagely, angrily, charging her with her betrayal, and with his own loneliness. But her smile was uncertain, hiding a happiness more precious to him than his own. When he knew this, he knew finally that he had lost her.

"No," he said. "Not unfair."

She came to him. He got up and their hands joined. He held her slim fingers and felt the bones beneath the warm dry flesh.

"I'm sorry, Stan," she said. "Much sorrier than I thought I would be."

"There was something there?"

"There still is."

He released her hands. "I thought he was lucky, but there's something else, isn't there? He has a gift."

"Joey?"

"The gift of loving."

"Yes, he has that."

"Where is he now?"

"He stopped at the station to inquire about something we're expecting from Lausanne. He'll be here soon."

"Need I stay," he asked her, "to testify?"

She smiled. "Not for that. But he'd like to see you. Can't you stay over? There's a spare room."

"Perhaps another time."

"I wish you'd stay." She looked at him, and said again, "I'm sorry."

"Give my love to Aunt Kitty."

"Kiss me goodbye."

There was no desire, but the long tremor of sadness that he would always remember. She came to the door with him, and probably stood watching, but he did not look back.

He looked back where the road took a sharp bend into the

village. The green-and-white hill came down to the chalet and the road and then plunged farther still toward the station. He remembered now there was a short cut there, a path leading through the field, past the old stone farmhouse. Someone was coming up that way. It was too far off to see his face, but it could only be Joseph. He climbed awkwardly, dragging one foot.

The day was warmer. Runnels of water came from the melting snow and ran down the slope, joining together until they formed a small swift-running stream. Stanley watched until Joseph went in and closed the garden gate behind him. Then he turned and continued to walk down into the village.



**Novels from Longmans**

---

**Francis King**  
**THE CUSTOM HOUSE**

**John Stroud**  
**ON THE LOOSE**

**Nina Bawden**  
**IN HONOUR BOUND**

**Thomas Duncan**  
**VIRGO DESCENDING**

**John Stroud**  
**TOUCH AND GO**

**Marion Friedmann**  
**THE SLAP**

---

**LONGMANS**